

Cowboy and Wild West Myths in Community and Franchise Banking of the Southwestern United States

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Our chapter problematizes the relation between narratives of writing and oral stories. We propose a complexity between individual memory and collective memory of people in organization. Specifically our exploration suggests that there is a collapse of critical history, as the official codifications of the past become a sort of propaganda, a socialization of common sense, detached from the nuances social experience. Storytelling for us is the arena of several currencies of sensemaking: retrospective, ontologic-now, and prospective. We also include antenarratives (the bet of a future, & the pre-storying before narrative coherence). Antenarratives (Boje 2001, 2008) populate organization discourse, but because of the preference for retrospection they are overlooked phenomenon.

The contribution of our chapter is to explore how myths in the banking industry (written as well as the oral tradition), create imbalances in what Nietzsche calls three histories: the antiquarian (stuck in the past), the monumental (antenarrative bids on the future) and a critical history (necessary to break bonds with the past and not be anchorless in the future). We then look at how the mythic aspects of "cowboy and wild west banking" are embedded in the architecture. We use the case to interrogate several theories of myth. Specifically in the banking lore we explore how hegemonic practices of franchise banks, in this instance, appropriate and distort the history of community banks. We end by saying that the alignment of the three histories has broken down. The antiquarian history (Wild West) has been superimposed over any critical history and the monumental is just missing in action. Without critical history, the banking industry tries to embed itself into southwestern cowboy culture, but without any sensemaking of the reality.

We therefore look at storytelling as complex dynamics between narrative, story, and antenarrative. We question the linearity of the usual social dimensions of storytelling, which implies sharing retrospective narratives of the past, stories of the now-and-here, and antenarratives of possible futures. If we move beyond these linear assumptions of

temporality, we can begin to theorize retrospection, now-spection, and prospective sensemaking as simultaneity, in a more holographic and dialogic enterprise of collective memory.

We can relate our thesis of non-linear collective memory, and the more hegemonic aspects of myth, to several other important works. Mikhail Bakhtin (1973: 12), for example, 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.

Walter Benjamin (1936) decries the death of story competencies that come from the industrial revolution. The work group is broken apart, and there is no longer a venue for storytellers to practice their art. Benjamin works on the distinction in the notion of experience between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. *Erlebnis* refers to lived-through experience while *Erfahrung* refers to the accumulated experience; the idea is that only through the socially communicable *Erfahrung*, *Erlebnis* becomes meaningful. Benjamin talks about a trauma in the modern era in the sense of the loss of lived-through, moment-by-moment experience, that becomes left over that cannot really fit in the collective communicable experience. This informs our thesis as individual experience in most of the organizational context cannot be registered under a collective tellable frame and thus cannot find space in such contexts. Mainstream organization memory often neglects both the distinctly subjective experience of remembering and dialogic (non-univocal) sociohistorical context of narrative-memory.

This distortion of history by narrative into monologic 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).

Derrida approaches story as something more contextualized and intertextual than the monologic narrative:

Each “story” (and each occurrence of the word “story,” (of itself), each story in the story) is part of the other, makes the other part (of itself), is at once larger and smaller than itself, includes itself without including (or comprehending) itself, identifies itself with itself even as it remains utterly different from its homonym. (Derrida, 1979: 99-100).

Retrospective sensemaking is the demand to return to the scene to “tell us exactly what happened” (Derrida, p. 260), “to force a narrative out of the narrator” (p. 263), or to assemble “narrative fragment” (p. 263) after narrative fragment into some originary detective-puzzle in a “linearity” of writing narratives. What gets overlooked is that the antenarrative and story processes of sensemaking are in dynamic tension with the retrospective puzzle making. And, often the biggest myth of all is the assumption that corporate history has any puzzle underlying it, and is somewhere between fictive imagination and duplicitous deceit.

There is a very famous dialogue written by Plato, between Socrates and Phaedrus (i.e. Eco, 1997: 295). It is a myth about the origin of writing, and includes some cautions by the Pharaoh, who wonders if people will no longer rely on their own memory, and become more easily deceived.

SOCRATES: ... It would take a long time to repeat all that Thamus said to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts. But when they came to letters, this, said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; it is a specific both for the memory and for the wit. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, the parent or inventor of an art is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance, you who are the father of letters, from a paternal love of your own children have been led to attribute to them a quality which they cannot have; for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves. The specific which you have discovered is an aid not to memory, but to reminiscence, and you give your disciples not truth, but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing; they will appear to be omniscient and will generally know nothing; they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality¹.

This famous passage is often used as a rationale for privileging oral tradition over the external device, the written narrative. This can lead to a nostalgic-romantization of orality over writing. Our thesis is that mythic processes of organizations romanticize both orality

¹ Passage from Plato's Phaedrus (Translated by Benjamin Jowett), accessed August 18, 2008 <http://books.mirror.org/plato/phaedrus/>

and writing, neglecting what is suspended in-between, the more nuanced reality of socioeconomic history. Our contribution is the how mythmaking in organizations can be an erosion of collective memory.

This is perhaps best expressed by Frederick Nietzsche (1874), who looks at the relationship between three types of history: antiquarian, monumental, and critical. Whether oral or written, an antiquarian history preserves the past trivialities without a sense of their sociopolitical import. Now and again super-leader creates a monumental historical shift, a break from the antiquarian past. And a critical history is what we now call a deconstruction of both the antiquarian preservation, and the heroic worship of monumentalism. Nietzsche's point is that all three histories need to be seen as in or out of balance. Critical history without a sense of monumental purpose, and without the details of antiquarian past, is a downward spiral into malaise. This 'excess of history' according to Nietzsche (1874/1997: 120) "no longer knows how to employ the past as a nourishing food." Antiquarian and monumental fragments recombine, that cover over gaps in critical history. However, too much critical history can interfere with forgetting, a necessary element of social progress. "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).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. We begin with a presentation of myths in the banking industry, somewhere in the southwestern United States. We look at the written as well as the oral tradition, and the distortions to Nietzsche's three histories. We then look at how the mythic aspects of "cowboy and wild west banking" are embedded in the architecture. Next we develop the contribution of the chapter, an interrogation of theories of myth, the device of writing, and the role of orality, in the complex phenomenon of 'collective memory.' Specifically in the banking lore we explore how hegemonic practices of franchise banks, in this instance, appropriate and distort the history of community banks. Nietzsche's charge that the three histories be in balance breaks down. There is little critical history, an abundance of antiquarian, in ways that distorts monumental hero's journey. Without critical history, the banking industry tries to embed itself into southwestern cowboy culture, but without any sensemaking of the reality.

Cowboy and Wild West mythology

The mythology of the Wild West became particularly appealing to Norwest Bank. Norwest formed just months before the stock market crash of 1929 (as two associated formed Minnesota's Northwest Bancorporation and the First Bank Stock, which became known as U.S. Bancorp): the cooperative became known as "Banco" (which included Northwestern National Bank of Minneapolis); 90 banks joined Banco in its first year, and by 1932 there were 139 affiliates. Norwest became the heir to Banco, and grew to become the 11th largest U.S. bank by 1997 (assets of \$88.54 billion), with operations in 16 states. Norwest was the largest contiguous bank franchise with strong markets in Minnesota, Colorado, and Iowa. Norwest Financial covered all 50 states, plus operations in Canada, the Caribbean, and Central America.

In June 1998, Norwest acquired Wells Fargo & Company. Wells Fargo describes itself as the product of a "merger of equals" with Norwest in 1998. However, given the acquisition and consolidation frenzy going on, this is a bit of an exaggeration. Norwest, by most accounts in the financial community, acquired Wells Fargo.

In a move that speaks to our theme of myth making, Norwest changed its name to Wells Fargo and moved its headquarters from Minneapolis to San Francisco. Under its new name (Wells Fargo), there were other acquisitions, such as First Security Corporation in 2001, which in turn had acquired First National Bank of Dona Ana in 1998. Our focus is to understand why and how Norwest appropriated another bank's history, then superimposed it onto its subsequent bank acquisitions. **Henry Wells and William Fargo** founded Wells Fargo & Company in 1852, and as the story goes, it became a legendary part of the American Wild West. Henri Wells and William Fargo provided from 1852 "banking and express service to Western pioneers. They opened their first banking and express service in the gold rush port of San Francisco, and soon Wells Fargo's trustworthy agents moved into other Western mining camps and settlements,

providing essential banking services, reliable transportation of gold and goods, and dependable mail delivery to miners, merchants and farmers” (Wells Fargo brochure)².

Norwest and Wells Fargo used the Wells Fargo logo, and other symbols, such as the stagecoach and strongbox, to capitalize on the popular culture appeal of the “cowboy and wild west” as a more appealing history than a Minneapolis bank. Picture a team of galloping horses, pulling a stagecoach across the dessert of the Wild West, or pictures of row-hide gloved hands carrying a Wells Fargo & Company strong box down from the stagecoach.

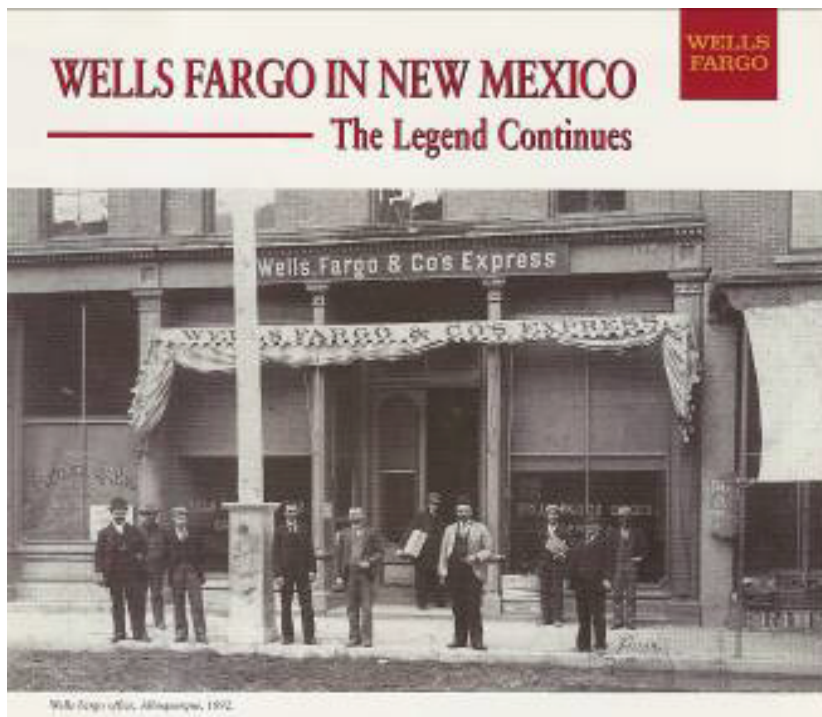


Picture 1. Wells Fargo’s brochure

In the western states, into which the Norwest, in its new Trojan horse – Wells Fargo stagecoach and horses. Special historical documents were developed in Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Colorado, Utah, etc. to give Wells Fargo a unique history in each state. Never mind that, for the most part, Norwest had never been there. In addition,

² Quote is from a four-color foldout brochure, titled “Wells Fargo in New Mexico: The Legend Continues.” Not dated.

as our critical history unfolds, we observed that the community banks being absorbed into the Wells Fargo – Trojan- Stagecoach --- each had their own unique histories.



Picture 2: Brochure of Wells Fargo Bank

For example, in a series of interviews conducted as part of our research (Musacchio Adorisio, 2008a, b; Boje & Musacchio Adorisio, 2008) we concluded that the New and Improved Wells Fargo, purged the acquired community banks for their local history, and enrolled them in a crash course on Wells Fargo history. It's a history that for Norwest, as well as for the acquired community and regional banks, actually never existed. And as such its, not something that is a larger-than-life myth, its more of what Baudrillard (1983) would call a hyperreality (a copy of a copy, without any original). As we cited in the introductory quote "they will be tiresome company, having the show of wisdom without the reality."³ The story of First National Bank of Las Cruces is erased from being, as quoted in the abovementioned brochure:

In 1998, Wells Fargo and Norwest joined in a merger of equals. Then at the beginning of this new century, Wells Fargo acquired First National Bank of Farmington and First Security offices in the greater metropolitan area of

³ Passage from Plato's Phaedrus (Translated by Benjamin Jowett), accessed August 18, 2008 <http://books.mirror.org/plato/phaedrus/>

Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Roswell and Santa Fe. The heritage of these pioneer New Mexico financial institutions lives under the familiar Wells Fargo name (Wells Fargo Brochure).

The 90 years history of First National Bank of Las Cruces is collapsed into the First Security one without any critical problematization. What is interesting is that First Security had been in town for a short amount of time when Wells Fargo came in. In the hyperreality of the recollection First Security and First National of Las Cruces become the same bank. The thick 90 years history recollected by historian Leon Metz in his book *Southern New Mexico Empire* is completely forgotten. Interestingly enough the story itself of the bank is not devoid of antiquarian and monumental endeavors:

Strong and magnetic individuals have guided the bank since its creation...however the story of First National Bank of Dona Ana County is more than a record of dividends and interest rates, of loan paid off and mortgages that struggled. A bank is people...bank employees have served in elected offices, they have sat on the federal, state and local, civic and professional boards. They have attended church and public meetings. They have managed business. Most have had backgrounds and educations fitting them to be bankers. Some have been better equipped than others...The history of First National Bank of Dona Ana County is a narrative of regional growth, of how an obscure bank rose to prominence during the Twentieth Century. The saga of the First National Bank of Dona Ana County, New Mexico, is the chronicle of a leader (Metz, 1991, xi-xii).

Greatness of monumental history is combined with the conservative sensitivity of antiquarian history: the “strong, magnetic individuals” and moreover “the chronicle of a leader” on the one hand are paired with the account of “bank employees” and of the reconstruction of a world and a community as a model to admire and respect.

There are two myths involved: one is that of the exemplary individual/s and the other is a myth of the origin, of a golden age of prosperity and growth.

This is true not only for the written account such as that of historian Leon Metz but also for the oral and conversational storytelling we collected during our field research.

It must be said that the book has been written in 1991 when First National Bank of Dona Ana was still an existing institution, while the interviews we collected with former executives of the bank, are recollections of a bank that does not exist any longer and is now part of the Wells Fargo bank. As we have said before, the bank was bought by First

Security Corporation of Salt Lake City in 1998 which was acquired by Wells Fargo in 2000.

There are many examples of monumental storytelling in the written accounts we have analyzed, here is an example from the book by historian Leon Metz:

Strong and magnetic individuals have guided the bank since its creation. Nicolas Galles, Oscar Snow, H.B. Holt and William Sutherland are four of many who gave it direction and good judgment during its formative years. Frank O. Papen and a host of others have since guided it to even more impressive heights (Metz, 1991, xi).

Here is another example from an article on the history of the bank, written on the occasion of its ninety anniversary:

It started as a dream by a handful of local business leaders who saw the potential for a great future in a small community on the banks of the Rio Grande in southern New Mexico...In 1951, an energetic young local businessmen who had come to Las Cruces to sell insurance in the early 1940s, acquired his first shares of stock in First National Bank. That man was Frank O. Papen, the man who has guided First National for nearly half of its years in existence to become the dynamic institution that it is today.

The mythology of this exceptional and exemplary individual is part of the collective memory of not only the employees of the former First National Bank of Dona Ana, but also of some of the new Wells Fargo bankers.

There are several stories that we collected during the interviews and that are spontaneously evoked by bankers of First National Bank of Dona Ana when referring to its patriarch. One of them is the “Anthony Story”.

Here is the reconstruction of one of the bankers:

One of the most interesting stories that I like to tell...well originally when Mr. Papen was putting his bank together the bank was on one side of the street and it was called First State Bank of Anthony, Texas and he bought that bank and changed the name on it to the First National Bank of Anthony and he built a huge beautiful building but what he didn't realized is that he got across the state line...Mr. Haner and Mr. Papen spent considerable time in Washington and they had them to change into First National Bank of Anthony, New Mexico and he changed to the First National Bank of Dona Ana county...HE WAS THE ONLY ONE TO EVER MOVE A BANK ACROSS THE STATE LINE AND CHANGE THE NAME OF THE BANK FIVE TIMES.

And from another interviewee:

...The way I remember the story, I don't know if I am totally accurate on this, the way I remember the building was built and it suddenly occurred that the bank was not in New Mexico, was in Texas and had to be moved and those days they had the ban on interstate banking, and so after several trips to Washington...and they went back on several occasions and finally closed one eye and keep reading the statute and keep rereading them and finally found that there was a comma left out of one sentences that changed the meaning of a sentence, that allowed that bank to move over to the New Mexico, so they gave the approval and then they went back and cleaned the act and that's a true story and that would never happen today either.

And yet another interviewee from a conversational storytelling extract:

- (1) I don't know whether he did it or not, but he (Frank) acquired what was called First National Bank of Anthony, Texas.
- (2) and he moved it across the state line...
- (1) Right and nobody knows by this day how he got that done.
- (2) and that was something he was really proud of...
- (1)I don't know whether it was a matter of power or he just confused the hell out of people and ended up with what he wanted ((LAUGHS)) I don't know, but he was able to get things done, his attitude was if it need to be done we will find a way to get it done and that was his way to go head and try.

This story, along with the story of the construction of the tower and all the other stories that are part of Frank Papen mythology are part of the collective memory of the community of bankers interviewed, the tower and the pictures of the past presidents of the banks in the walls of the bank also relate to collective memory. Halbwachs (1950/1980) has made it clear how collective memory is social construction activated by each and every community in a constant process of selection and reconstruction of significant events. What is interesting is the idea that the past is reconstructed from the present following different and alternative paths according to the different groups by which they are activated. Namer (1987) argues that collective memory reconstruction happens through the discursive interaction among the members of different social groups. Returning to the mythology performed in the orality, monumental history is paired with antiquarian sensitivity. Frank Papen is described as a man of a different time. Here are the words of one of the interviewees:

Those days Las Cruces was very small he was shaking everybody's hands and you are banking with me and that's how he built up the bank...

The sense of the past here is a sense of antiquarian sentiment, of a golden age for community banking in which the banker had a different status.

Well, I can tell you that the modern day banker version of community involvement is not the same of the community involvement activities of people that came out of Frank's generation because they were involved in everything and up to their neck and they could spend, a guy in Frank's job, if he never came in to the bank it wouldn't have made any difference, he was out involved in the chambers of commerce, he was involved with economic development and all those other issues...

The recollections of life at First National bank are the recollections of a golden age, the climate seems to reflect the external pleasant and stable weather of the South-west.

Says one of the interviewees:

We wanted a good life and it's a good life here, we had a good time and Mr. Papen loved to shake hands and hug people and tell them how good they were doing and how wonderful everything was, you know he was just that kind of guy...

Again antiquarian recollection meets with monumental one in the following extract from a newsletter of the bank for the employees of 1980:

At a recent stockholder meeting, our Chairman of the Board, State Sen. Frank O. Papen, spoke on the history of First National Bank since its founding in 1905 with only \$ 25,000 worth of capital. After reviewing the past however senator Papen turned his remarks to the future and the decade of the 1980s, noting "The next decade will be a period of even greater growth for New Mexico than ever before. Our climate, our natural resources and the incredible variety of recreational opportunities in our state will guarantee our economic well being almost in spite of what may happen at a national level" (Vol.VII, N°5, April 1980).

What we want to point out with all these excerpts and documents is that both the oral and the written accounts are equally subjected to monumental and antiquarian reconstruction and how the mythmaking involved can play a crucial role in the erosion of local and alternative collective memories.

Cowboy and Wild West architecture

The same can be said for the storytelling embedded in the architecture. Along with the mythologies of the bank there are number of mythologies to which the bankers ascribed to and which are part of a larger collective memory of the community:

Papen talked to Manuel Acosta, explaining that the bank wanted a history of the Mesilla Valley in pictorial form (Metz, 1991, p.137).

It is a rather naive rendition of the history of the Mesilla Valley:

The murals opened with a conquistador standing beside a captured Apache.(The conquistador was Javier Adalto who worked for State Farm in El Paso. Eduardo Gonzalez was the Indian). The second panel continued the Indian conquest. It featured a Franciscan father imploring both side to accept God and peace...A valiant pioneer lady posed with her children. (Betty Armstrong of the Mesilla Book Store was the model).The next panel described the Wild West...the mural progression then moved on to Fort Selden, a (genuine) Loretto nun, an adobero constructing a typical New Mexico residence, a santero carving a wooden Santo, an early railroad engine, the Loretto Academy and a typical home of the period. (Manuel Acosta was the santero. Lucas Herrera of Radio Shack was the man with the mule. Nina Maria Jemente was the young girl reading. The boy sitting alongside was Frank O. Papen jr., who would die tragically shortly afterwards when an automobile struck him). A typical vaquero represented the transition into modern times (Daniel Herrera, brother to Lucas, stood tall in a blue shirt, black hat and rope. "I painted him alone on a panel because he brought all this remarkable equipment, including the chaps, from Marfa, Texas" Acosta said. "The gear was magnificent". The last horizontal scene placed Dona Ana County in the modern world. Mariachis played in front of the First National Bank building. Geese waddled among the pecan trees at Stahmann Farms. The administration building appeared at New Mexico State University. A missile represented White Sands, cotton the farmers, and a dam for Elephant Butte (Metz, 1991, p. 137-138).

The murals represent an extraordinary visual expression of collective memory. They are a combination of antiquarian and monumental history-telling: a celebration of the past in visual form.

In his study of the iconography of the Capitol Building, Schwartz (1982) has analyzed the events and persons commemorated in the U.S. Capitol and demonstrated how significance assigned to events and persons "is affected by the organization and needs of

social groups” (1982:374). “Commemoration” he argues “lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values. Commemoration...is in this sense a register of sacred history” (1982:377).

Together with the representation of past events in pictorial form, in the lobby of the bank we find the pictures of the past presidents of the bank, while outside the bank we find a memorial of Frank Papen.



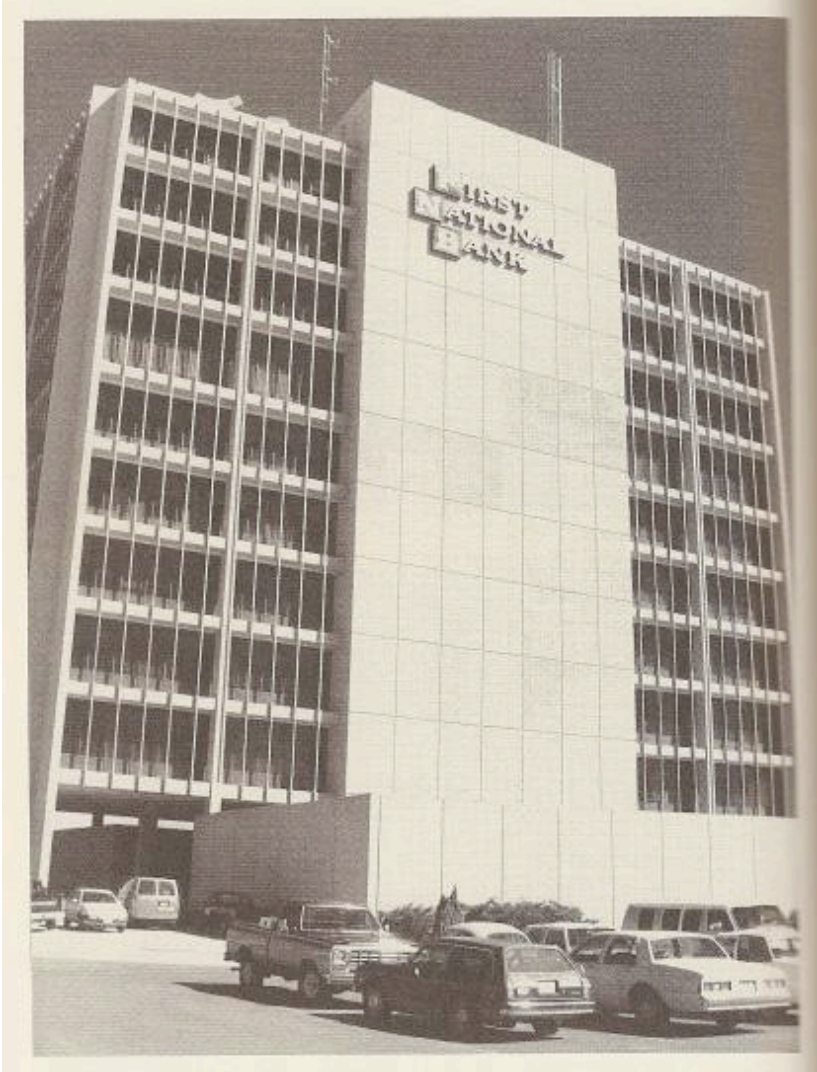
Picture 3. Papen's Memorial

What is important to point out here is that the collective interpretation of the past, the historical past as well as the organizational past, is exploited by the present through an occupation of space. But the present we are talking about though, is no longer a present, because of the organizational changes that we have talked about in the previous section: this past has no significance nor relevance for the present needs.

For this reasons, the murals, as well the pictures of the presidents or the memorial are subjected to different visibility due to their connection to present values and needs.

While the murals remain “convenient object of consensus among later generations” (Schwartz, 1982: 398), the same cannot be said about the pictures of the presidents of First National Bank or Papen’s memorial.

In the same line we can analyze the physical presence of the tower, a ten storey building that was built by Frank Papen in 1962 and which represent a unique landscape feature in the Las Cruces community, it is by far the tallest building and can be seen from every part of town.



Picture 4: First National Bank tower

If you drive through Las Cruces now, you will see the building with a big Wells Fargo sign on it. The stories of the origins of building are buried under the Wells Fargo name. In this case the grandiosity and the celebration of the building as a remarkable landscape feature of the town are appropriated and exploited by Wells Fargo.

During our research interviews we have collected a number of similar version of the story of the origins of the building, these stories have been told to us by both the former First National bankers, such as the one that follows:

And originally was going to be a seven story, well he wanted a ten story building and they couldn't make its feasibility work and so they finally settle to seven and as a side the economy was in a tank in the late sixties and they guy that was building it had another job that fell through and he had a bunch of crew that he needed to keep busy so he went to Frank and said I'll put the other three story of that building for 300000 I don't remember the number but significantly less it would have been had we contracted before because he was trying to keep his crew busy, so that's how it ended up to be a ten story building, if you go downtown and you go through that building today you would see that the air conditioning and all the mechanical is on the seventh floor and that's why, because it was already been topped out when they came to it.

And the Wells Fargo bankers:

There's our tower. There's the tower downtown here, now the Wells Fargo tower, built in 1967. My understanding is that when they built the building it was going to be seven storey high and then Frank Papen was having a cocktail with the contractor and said what would it take to go up another three, so all the utilities, all that is on the seventh floor, where typically would be up on top.

The same story has been told to us by almost all the interviewees, proving the socialization of a significative and exploitable past.

The question is thus, how should we then consider the mythologies and the mythmaking processes offered by the accounts provided by the bankers and embedded in the texts and the architectures that have been produced by the banking institutions involved?

Overview of contributions of our banking study

Narrative has mainly been studied as only a form of retrospective (backward-facing) sensemaking. Our contribution is to look at prospective sensemaking in antenarrating, where there is a 'bet' on the future, and a 'before' of narrative petrification (or stabilization). We also look at a third aspect of storytelling: "living story" that unfolds in the present moment of Being (as a Bakhtinian concept that gets at dialogism, as well as emergence in the Now and Here, & an answerability to act or not, to intervene or not in what is unfolding in the social). Finally, as a contribution we want to look at how stabilized-narrative-retrospection, living story (Now & Here), and the prospective-antenarrating-bets-on-future are in interplay. This keeps the story from being dualistic (or tri-istic) and allows for ways one morphs into the other, ways the antenarrating rewrites history, ways the relics of history fixate the antenarrating, the way that sensemaking of the living story becomes disallowed in both moves.

Returning to the initial concern of the myth provided by Plato, that is to say the risk of mechanistic memory devices such as the writing, the criticism that we have provided is a criticism that crossed both the writing and the oral and encompasses the visual as well.

The criticism is directed in this sense towards the laws or rules governing the retrospective mythical production of the past. As Derrida points out in his *Plato's pharmacy* (1972/1981) myths are superimpositions on a "forever imperceptible" past. Using an intriguing spatial metaphor Lowenthal affirmed that the past is a "foreign country" (Lowenthal, 1985) instrumentally reproduced from the present.

In the previous sections we have provided examples of written, oral and even visual narratives produced by specific banking institutions at different times representing conflicting and overlapping versions of a mythical past.

We have seen how mythmaking processes have been activated by different social groups in different times and how the selective process of remembering can be traceable in the different accounts provided in the written, oral and visual forms.

Our interest in these forms is not merely related to the way memories and mythologies are expressed within a specific social context such as that of a banking institution; written, oral and visual narratives are not only the result of immutable mythmaking and

memory reconstruction: they are themselves traces (symbols) of always alternative and possible configurations.

Following Derrida's notion of *différance* we would ask ourselves if myths as such exists as a clear signified that refers to a common and shared meaning, or if they are only *différance*. Derrida uses the word *différance* (1998) to address the gap between what the sign is and what it stands for, and thus between text and being: as this gap can never be filled, it can nevertheless leave traces that can be subjected to different readings and interpretations.

Such traces are themselves subversive, they are created to fulfill a nostalgic idea of completeness of meaning to which they inevitably represent a negative.

Our proposal is that of refusing every ideologization of myth and to reflect instead on the experience of myth. It is in this sense that myth becomes relevant once we have devoid myth of every intrinsic legitimacy of truth.

The experience of myth is the experience of an absence, it is the infinite and indeterminate telling of the man in front of a "forever imperceptible" past but it also represents, insofar as trace (symbol) the attempt to fulfill such gap, such *vacuum*.

It is only through the understanding of such an ambiguity that we can perform any attempt to understand the experience of myth, which is the object of this chapter.

The preoccupations or the concerns of Thamus that we discussed in the beginning of the chapter must be read in this sense, in the sense of the problematization of the relationship between the text and being, which as we have argued can be extended as well to the orality or the visuality. Horkheimer and Adorno (1979) have identified in the myth the nihilist attempt to eliminate the horror of being, a way to exorcize the *vacuum*, the absence we were talking about, through a search of sense that we believe well adapts to the monumental and antiquarian collectively produced meaning.

Conclusions

An antenarrative (bet on the future) was made by Wells Fargo (once acquired by Norwest Bank chain). The antenarrative bet was that the Wild West mythology of Wells Fargo's history could be seamlessly superimposed on all the acquired community banks, and onto the old Norwest bank chain. As the accumulation of banks continued, Wells Fargo legends had to be written as an antenarrative of the future of the bank. Now this future as a Wild West storytelling, also bled over into history, into a rewriting of history. The antenarrative of the future had to rewrite the past of each acquired bank. So there was forceful (even violent) forgetting, a Stalinist-like purge of the monumental history of each local community bank. The collective memory of the local bank was purged. Installed in its place is the mythology of Wells Fargo, as the only allowable future.

In the myth provided by Plato, there is a risk of a mechanistic memory. In our case it is a forward-memory (the bet on the future), and a re-remembering (a forceful forgetting of the lived experience of community bank people). The visual panel of the cowboy, stagecoach, strongbox becomes superimposed over all other visual displays of history and future.

There are several temporal processes being distorted. First, the retrospective sensemaking of Wells Fargo past, become mechanistic-template imposed on the Now, and it overrules sensemaking of the Now and Here. Further, as an antenarrative, there is prospective sensemaking, but instead of being an open, morphing, evolving, and unfinished antenarrating, the narrative of the past has solidified and fossilized the future before it has had a chance to emerge, to be lived experience. The upshot is employees are indoctrinated and otherwise forced to remember a false history, and to dissimulate their own lived history (if they have been community bank employees, managers, or customers.).

Thus we conclude, that this is an example of Derrida's point about Plato's pharmacy. A myth is superimposed on the past, present, and future, in an utilitarian and instrumental way, as a monologic. It is a form of myth colonization, by a franchise bank of community bank histories. To the victor goes the right to rewrite the past, and to craft the future, groundless, as it may be.

One implication of our study is that without a dialogical conversation and multi-authoring of the past, present, and future, there is a synthetic, highly plastic and superficial, even Disneyfied reality that people are working in and consuming. Script writers look for Wells Fargo antiquarian historical-nuggets, then beat them into shape for a corporate image, and then brand them onto community banks, as a sign of ownership. We have to raise a critical concern. With all the synthetic myth fantasy, and the groundless rehistoricizing, will the corporate culture become rudderless, stuck in a Wild West mythology, as it expands to other parts of the world without such a phantasm? There is a tipping point, which we believe has past, and the mythmaking is a form of ideologization, a glorification of corporate branding. Perhaps this approach by Wells Fargo is very Nietzschean, a nihilist attempt to eliminate the horror of being in bank, during an era of Enron, and the most recent U.S. horror of financial collapse and bailout.

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