

Chapter 5 Story Ethics

David M. Boje, Ph.D. New Mexico State University

October 10, 2006; Revised Dec 1 06

Chapter for Boje, D. M. (ed) 2008 *Critical Theory Ethics For Business and Public Administration* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Press).

I will assert a difference between ‘*narrative ethics*’ and ‘*story ethics*.’ The chapter deconstructs Adam Newton’s (1995) *Narrative Ethics*, and finds a duality of *narrative answerability in texts*, over marginalized concern with the *sociology of the corporeality of storytelling*. Gertrude Stein (1935), Walter Ong (1982), and Ivan Illich (1993) are among those who trace the genealogy of textuality as technology (paragraphing, alphabet, printing press) becoming dominant over orality in general, and how a ‘proper’ story is told. *Story ethics*, I posit, need not accept the duality of textuality over orality, and can instead construct an answerability that is conjunctive rather than either/or. Recognizing the social aspects of storytelling, in relation to textuality and orality, does this. The contribution to the project of this book, a ‘critical theory ethics’ is to suggest how Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1990, 1993) *answerability* goes beyond Newton’s framing of ‘narrative ethics’ capturing storytelling as what writers do. Indeed Newton gives interpretations of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, as well as Bakhtin that I will amend. These amendments open a space for *story ethics* rooted in critical theory.

By way of introduction, the story ethics I have in mind is to stop fitting a simple linear beginning, middle and end (*hereafter BME*) narrative structure onto phenomenal complexity (Letiche, 2000; Boje, 2000). BME is to oversimplifying, does not get at the interweave of your story and my story. We are answerable for our participation in the corporeality of one another’s stories because that participation is unique and non-recurrent. We are answerable when we occupy one-occurrent, participation in-the-moment of Being, that is compelling acknowledgment of our unique obligation to do the deed of story listener and storyteller, to act answerably to change the social (Bakhtin, 1993: 42). Yet oftentimes, whatever the storytelling, many people do not feel complicit.

I take the perspective that our stories intertwine, yet we know little of where others’ stories begin, or how they ill unfold, and perhaps move unconnectedly. As we witness our complicity, there is obligative compellingness that non-participants do not possess. We may not pay much attention to the weave of stories in which we participate. Or despite awareness of such a weave, we may just deny any ontological culpability. When others’ living stories interfere with our own, we can become more aware.

One reason why participating in Being, witnessing or otherwise complicit in oppression, does not bring about compelling obligative answerability to act, is that we have lost our skills as storytellers and become meaningless narrators. Walter Benjamin (1936/1955: 83) begins by proclaiming, “*The art of storytelling is coming to an end.*” We have lost our “ability to tell a tale properly” because “experience has fallen in value” (p. 83-84). His last line informs the thesis of this chapter: “The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself” (p. 109). The storyteller is not just communicating experience of self or others, but engaged in moral reflexivity. For Benjamin, changes in capitalism took the art of storytelling away from the craft-arts, from the context of weavers, mariners, and other craft-contexts where there was time to hone listening and telling skills, where journey-persons traveled, and returned to tell tales. With the novel, the information age, division of labor, and the managerialist command that workers no longer story while they work, the ancient orality skills became just narrative skills of the disinterested reader, the apathetic bystander, the one not compelled to do anything about anything. In narrative, there is all that explication, the privileging of textual-ways over oral-ways, and we are just text-readers, not complicit in moments of social Being. In the lost art, listeners provided their own explication, they did not need tellers to fill-in-between-the-lines, and silence could communicate.

Complexity of Systemicity and Storytelling I take a complexity perspective on storytelling and its relation to what I call ‘systemicity.’ Complexity may have clear patterns in simulations (fractals, bifurcations, etc). In the corporeal world it’s not so clear, coherent, and discernable. We look for completion, for patterns that resolve, but often there are just contradictions, and no happy ending, not even temporary restful patterns in sight. *Systemicity* is what is unfinished, unfinalized, unmerged, and downright mysterious. Systemicity is not a static idea of some whole, completed, finalized ‘system’ that has no mystery. Complexity comes about then systemicity is not absolutely clear. We are not so smart that we can sort out the complexity of systemicity and its relation to the web of stories in which we participate, that are also unfinalized, not as full of BME coherence as narrativists present.

Gabriel’s (2000) and Czarniawska’s (1997, 1998), and my work (Boje 1991, 1995, 2001, 2006a, b), define story (as well as narrative) quite differently. Gabriel and

Czarniawska take a coherence view (proper story has BME) For Gabriel there must also be embellishment. For Czarniawska a problem is resolved. Boje, by contrast, looks at antenarrative, and at emergent stories that are terse, fragmented, socially distributed, and do not meet the coherence criteria. Yet, it is these incoherent tales, and the lost ability to make sense of them that Benjamin laments, that is critical to answerability. Czarniawska (2004) changed her definition, somewhat, and now allows for fragmented, interrupted, and distributed storytelling. However, she still prefers the more “petrified” narrative (her term).

We enter storytelling mostly often in the middle, and have little clue about any beginning or where its going to end, which it never does. We enter into what is already in motion, and do not stick around to see how it all works out, if it ever does. In this way an organization, be it public or private, is quite mysterious. We listen, ‘what are they saying?’ “Why are they saying it here and now?’ We fill in-between-the-lines overlaying structure of BME, just they way we were taught to do in those writing course we took in high school. It’s the way so many movies are presented, and many novels for that matter. In short there is a narrative expectation for coherence that goes back to Aristotle (350 BCE). Yet, in what I view as storytelling, there are many possibilities, and everything is rarely resolved. I do not experience to many tidy endings in my daily life. There are no guarantees that an ending will happen or some “antenarrative” will attain coherence (Boje, 2001: 1-5).

In what follows I want to specify how narrowly narrative ethics has been theorized. Then, I want to open up a space for story ethics, but not as a supplement, but in dynamic relationship to narrative ethics. I begin by deconstructing narrative ethics.

I. NARRATIVE ETHICS

Deconstructing Adam Z. Newton's (1995) award winning, and quite influential book, is appropriate. Newton (1995: 54) holds deconstruction, particularly, the version practiced by de Man entirely responsible for the hesitation about addressing ethics in the ways of narrative.

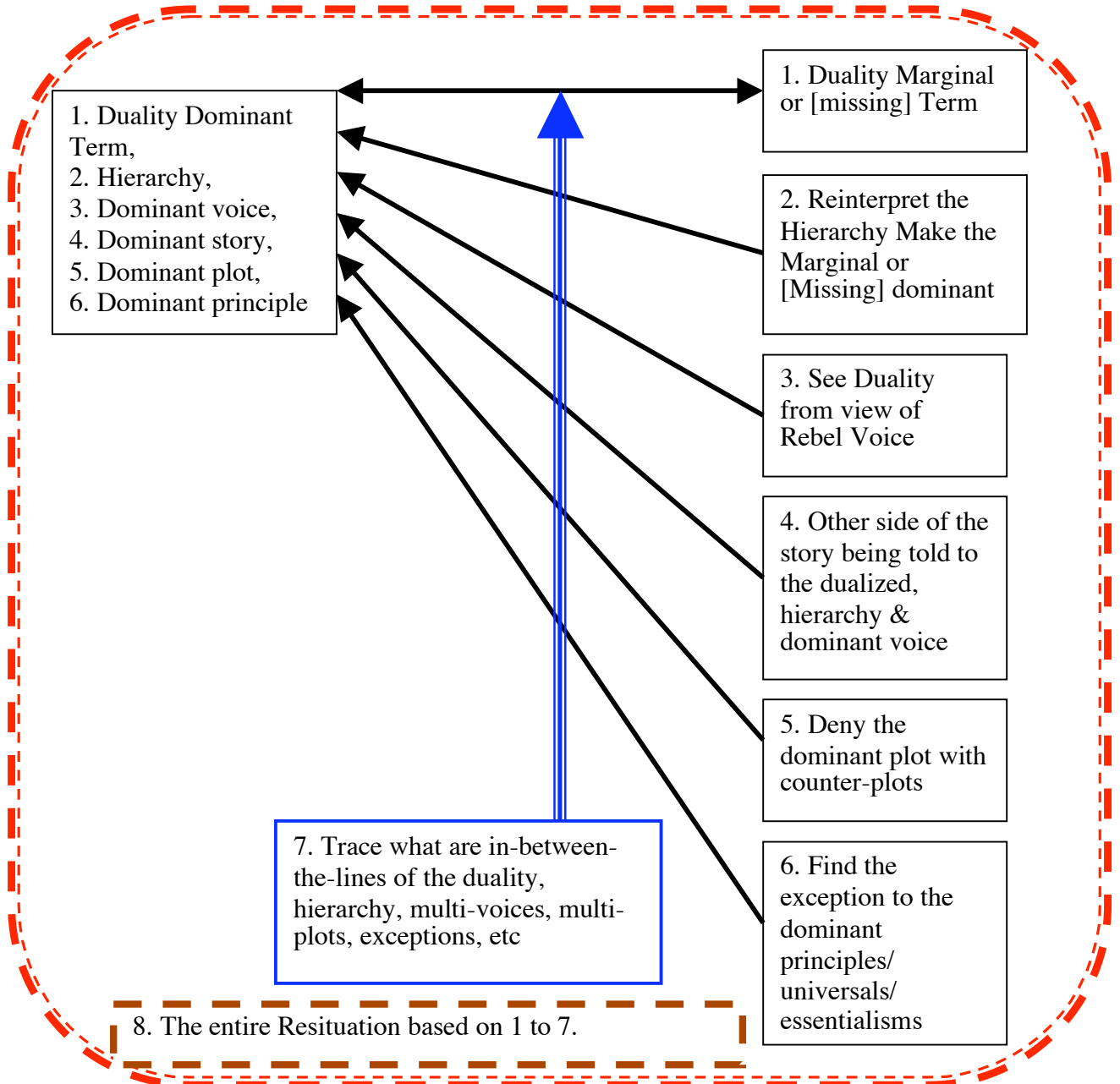


Figure 1: The Deconstructive Resituation

Figure 1 illustrates the inter-play of the 8 analytic processes (adapted from Boje, 2001: 21). Derridian deconstruction is a style, not a method. I am aware that making it accessible by positing a map is against the grain. What I propose as ‘story ethics’ traces our participation in one another’s stories. I will begin by defining how I will approach the deconstruction of Newton’s narrative ethics.

The idea of the narrative deconstruction analysis is to use the first seven analytic move to flesh out all the missing stuff (missing duality poles, missing view to what is hierarchical hegemony, missing voices, missing sides to the story, missing counter-plots, and missing exceptions to their universalistic principles. The seventh move is critical since it now lets you step back and see the full dynamics in play, that ‘control narrative’ (Boje, 2006a) is leaving out. Step 8, I would argue is the summation of all the prior steps. It allows one to see not just a new perspective, but to flesh out the dynamic relations in the fuller social field of antenarratives, and more dialogic stories (Boje, 2006a). In fleshing out the resituation we can overcome a key objection to deconstruction, i.e. that it is only about destruction.

Deconstruction allows one to extend what Kant (1781) called ‘architectonics.’ Kant only looked at the cognitive aspects. Bakhtin (1990, 1993) developed the architectonics into the interanimation of aesthetic, ethical, and cognitive discourses. I have done a brief analysis of architectonics with several students (Boje et al, 2005). The point of *resituation* is architectonically to get outside the Western dualities, and see the dynamics dialogically. Architectonics then is a dialogism (one of several types, along with polyphonic, stylistic, & chronotopic dialogisms).

The ‘dialogic manner of story’ (see Bakhtin, 1981, specific cites are in Boje, 2006a) is another way to put this. I take the view that while narrative and story overlap, and interpenetrate, yet there are some occasions where the differences that are important. The ‘control narrative’ since Aristotle (350 BCE) has put BME coherence, a sequencing and even causal linking of episodes and characters, as a prison of the more dialogic manner of storying and antenarrating, which have more dynamic architectonic dialogical interplay.

My focus is not to destroy the control narrative, but to see how it is contextualized and embedded in struggle with storytelling, including counterstories, counter-plots,

antenarrating, exceptions, etc. Resituation is about moving from either-or duality into ‘and’ relationship, to see, in this instance, how narrative ethics, and story ethics interpenetrate one another, and are dialectic or dialogic with one another in the space and temporality of the social. I turn new to deconstructing narrative ethics.

Newton’s (1995 book, *Narrative Ethics* is exceptionally well written. Newton attacks deconstruction for not tending more specifically to ethics. Yet, I find that what he writes about narrative is tightly constituted around literary writing. His narrative ethics removes oral storytelling from the narrative playing field. More accurately, it imprisons storytelling within narrative writing. Over and over again, storytelling is treated as something writers do inside their texts, and mostly these texts are novels.

Dualities There are many dualities. Key among these are written narrative textuality versus orality of traditional storytelling; novel versus other forms of writing; literary stylistics over other stylistics (painting, photos, science writing, corporate writing, and speaking styles such as conversation, speeches, skaz of everyday speech appropriated for corporate use such as ‘just do it’ or ‘I’m loving it’).

The power of narrative is for Newton, in its textual features, its form, and hermeneutic-layering (Newton, 1995: 289-290, 304). But to Benjamin (1936: 93), the layering comes from many rounds of telling listening and retelling, in a “slow piling on one top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of them and in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings.” Newton seems to truncate storytelling into written narrative forms, structures, and hermeneutic reading, at every turn of the page, but not the king of rounds of listening and telling in a tribe of storytellers, in a community of craftspeople. For example, Newton (1995: 290) reads Walter Benjamin as a lament over the loss of “the layering of *storytellings*” and how novel “transacts inner-persuasion across all dimension of text.” Newton’s layering is also unlike Bakhtin’s. Like Benjamin, Bakhtin (1981: 9-10) sees the phenomenon as multi-layered is a socially-dialogic way. Storytelling is multi-plotted, and as a “canonical genre the epic and novel “began to sound in new ways” (Bakhtin, p. 6). It is the new ways that Newton focuses upon, which have moved away from orality of the social and into textual representation. Newton (p. 28) cites Bakhtin’s focus on “the living word” but restricts it to narrative text, and to readers reading texts.

In short, the duality is novel writing over orality. There are other important dualities that come out in the analytic deconstructive moves that follow. A key one is certainly that writers of novels are intellectuals, whereas storytellers (particularly in Benjamin) are craftspeople doing crafts of storyteller, and when they do writing, they do it as the craft of people working in “industrial technology” in communities of tellers and listeners doing maritime travel, and factory jobs in weaving, sewing, wine-making, stonemasonry, printing, etc. The duality is liberal art versus the craft arts.

Reinterpreting the Hierarchy If we continue with Newton’s (1995: 290) reading of Benjamin (1936) classic essay, *the Storyteller*, the perspective is about everything that is textual representation. Newton (1995: 55) reflectionism self-deconstructs when he asserts narrative texts “reflect states of reality” and “such reflectionism” does not need to be treated as “naïve.” It self-deconstructs again when Newton (1995: 24) says, “I am aware of the dangers of collapsing the difference between the world of the text and the world which this final example of life-turned-into-story raises.” Newton’s ‘reflectionism’ claim is that the world of novels reflects the wider world of social discourse.

Newton’s duality of textuality over community-storytelling truncates the search for answerability. We are not asked to look at texts outside the novel nor to social discourses in orality.

If we explore a bit by reversing the hierarchy of writing over orality, what do we discover about Benjamin’s essay? Benjamin’s (1936: 83) reflections on the works of Nikolai Leskov, “teaches us that the art of storytelling is coming to an end. Less and less frequently do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly.” Storytelling was once “the securest among our possessions” this “ability to exchange experiences’ (p. 83) has been taken from us. Like Gertrude Stein (1935), Benjamin does not see newspapers demonstrating the traditional practices of storytelling. Both find nothing remarkable in the narrative style of newspaper writing. It is clear that Benjamin is lamenting the passage of mouth to mouth storytelling (p. 84), and sees few instances of it replicated in written narrative versions: “Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn” (p. 84). This supports Gabriel’s (2000) claim that proper storytelling is not prevalent in organizations.

The storyteller is not textual, but fully embodied in “corporeality” (p. 84). The storyteller is part of a “tribe of storytellers” and these are more traditional the traveling “trading seaman” and the stay-at-home “resident tiller of the soil” (p. 84-85). These did produce some storyteller writers, but became archaic types of writing as the trade structure of the Middle Ages gave way to the factory guilds. As a Critical Theorist (Frankfurt School), Benjamin is tracing how the traveling journeymen and the crafts of the artisan class were no longer the “university” for training the “masters of storytelling” (p. 85). In terms of ethics, “the art of storytelling is reaching its end” says Benjamin (1936: 87) “because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out” which is evident in the concomitant transition that “quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing.” And in place of living storytelling embedded in the trades of craftspeople, Benjamin sees the emergent novel writers. They do not write in the style of orality, the epic passed from mouth to mouth, until it is penned as epic. Rather Benjamin sees a different kind of novel writing, that is not taking “what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others” (p. 87). The novel as Newton (1995: 141) stresses is all about representation in “representational economy” of the novel, the mimetic of what is in human social life, made over into just pure fiction to effect textual catharsis.

In short, reversing the duality, we find that Benjamin is lamenting the passing of oral tradition and the emergence of a style of novel writing that is a move away from epic forms. Benjamin argues this transition to modern novel is emergent because the form of modern capitalism have removed the community where storytellers could practice their telling and their listening competencies, their ability to convey experience. And what is this new form of novel? It is the transition from storytelling to communication as “information” (p. 88) that offers “prompt verifiability.” And it is incommensurate, and “incompatible with the spirit of storytelling” and “the art of storytelling has become rare” in the time of the “dissemination of information” (p. 89). “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new” (p. 90). Storytelling on the other hand, “does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time” (p. 90). It was the ancient art of storytelling “to keep a story free from explication” (p. 89). “The storyteller foregoes psychological shading”

Leaving that to the listener (p. 91). These are three factors that Benjamin (1936: 90) says define “their germinative power to this day.” In the place of the factors of not expending itself, being free from explication, and not psychologically shading (leaving that to the listener or reader), Newton (1995) substitutes quite different factors.

Rebel Voices In Newton, the listener disappears, and becomes just a reader, a reader seduced into answerability by the narrative form and structure. In Benjamin’s (1936) traditional art of storytelling the gift of retelling came from the listener listening, being able to recount the story from the place in memory of the listener, by integrating the story heard with one’s own experiences, and expecting to be asked to repeat their version in a tribe of storytellers. The rebel voice of the teller who is in the “milieu of work— the rural, the maritime, and the urban” is left at the margin. In its place Newton focuses on the literary writer and the literary critic of the literary writer. He does not skin into the lowly life of the storyteller who is the worker. Newton’s storytellers do not begin their story by telling the “circumstances in which they themselves have learned what is to follow” (Benjamin, 1936: 92).

I think Bakhtin can be a rebel voice. Bakhtin (1990) is cited throughout Newton as the basis (along with Levinas) for a narrative ethics of answerability. For example Bakhtin’s heteroglossia is translated by Newton (1995: 253) to be “ceaseless oscillation between centripetal and centrifugal forces.” Yet for Bakhtin (1981) heteroglossia is the forces of language itself, not just writing, but spoken and architectural, and gestural language, such as in stylistic dialogism (the interplay of many written and non-written stylistics). For Newton the power of narrative is in quite physical forces. “Narrative ethics in these [text] cases conforms to a strict physics of force and counterforce” (Newton, 1995: 114, bracket addition, mine). It would seem that for Newton, dialogism is only in the physics of written language, and only the forms of other stylistics, such as conversation or science-talk embedded in the novel.

My own rebel voice would speak of the ethnographies, to sociology of everyday speech acts, to the ethnomethodology of social class, and political and economic types of writing that are beyond the pages of the novel. Newton’s narrative inquiry is too narrow. There are many different kinds of writing that a novel will mimic and many kinds of orality, but there is also a world outside the grasp of the typesetter and graphologist

(Newton, 1995: 170). There is the authoritarian power of corporations, of publishers, who control what novels are distributed, and on what topics, especially as Benjamin (1936: 83-84) remarks, in times of war and terror. There are controls on textual production in late modern capitalism.

Other Side of Story The other side of the story of *Narrative Ethics* is *Story Ethics*. Story rights, for example, is the side of the story not told by Newton (1995). It is how story rights inhere in the tribe of storytellers, in their very community, in their social rounds of telling, listening, and retelling (as we explored above). Newton closes out his book by writing about Benjamin's (1936) essay on *The Storyteller*. Newton (1995: 292) sees only "readers coming every closer to the story" and drawn like flies into "the gentle flames of his story" and to their death. The other side of this story is Benjamin is talking about something entirely different.

For Benjamin (1936: 93) "dying was once a public process in the life of the individual" but now we do not make paintings of people on their deathbed, as was done in Medieval times. Like storytelling, dying is being pushed further and further out of the world of the social and the living. To Benjamin, "death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell" (p. 94). It is the storyteller embedding his/her tale deep in natural history where death makes a regular appearance (p. 95). Newton (p. 116) truncates Benjamin's sociology of death, to just being writing about the "ultimate aesthetic act." But what is Benjamin getting at with the 'gentle flame.' I think it is another side to the story told by Newton. Benjamin (1936; 108-109) says, "The Storyteller" is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story... The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself." It is where the storyteller has integrated what others told him/her to tell, and what has been integrated from the living story of experience. It is not just the narrative tricks of the writing. Writers and readers and oral tellers participate in the sociological, in social classes, in economic differences, in racial and other diversities.

Finally, Newton (p. 14) cites Coleridge when claiming that "lives turn into stories and stories fold back again into lives." My reinterpretation of the duality is that lives turn into stories and stories fold back into our lives, not only from texts, but from storytelling in our day-to-day conversations.

Deny the Dominant Plot The plot in Newton's (1995) *Narrative Ethics* is that the written narrative affords the structures and forms that implicate the reader in ethical answerability, a responsibility for readers to what they read. The dominant plot is that using writerly tricks of rhetoric, the reader becomes answerable. "And more that we are responsible for knowing" due to the "catharsis of narrative ethics" (Newton, 1995: 292). (p. 292). My denial of the plot is that this is a textual ethics, tied to Aristotle's (350 BCE) poetic catharsis. The dominant plot is what I call 'control narrative' coherence (Boje, 2006a). The control narratives are "texts" that are supposed to "tax readers with ethical duties which increase in proportion to the measure with which they are taken up" (p. 292). I deny the plot that an ethics of reading is more powerful than an ethics of storytelling community. If people by textual ethics, and the ethics of reading, could relate to "the infinite, the transcendental, the stranger" (p. 292) surely there would be no sweatshops, no exploitation of labor anymore.

Newton (1995) interprets the critical ethics of Thodor Adorno as limited only to "readability" (p. 54). Yet for Adorno, what was important about was how narrative regulated experience. Adorno (1990) looked at how writing with all its punctuation tries to capture orality in the text, but in the end its just text and no one is really speaking (as Newton, 1995: 21 notes). In addition, there is indication that Adorno's Critical Theory moves past the narrative in novel-text into organization storytelling. For example, Adorno (1963/2000: 170) ends his series of 1963 lectures by declaring, "There is no ethics... in the administered world."

Find the Exceptions There are many exceptions to the principles and universals stated in Newton. The main one is Newton's (1995: 101, bracketed addition, mine) "essential principles of narrative ethics [are] at work in the novel" and nowhere else. It is the novel that "summons readers" to ethical answerability (p. 101). To Newton the narrative itself has power effect the narrator and reader dare not 'shake off' (p. 289) Stories are nested and embedded in narratives. He Reads Benjamin's (1936: 90) line about "preserves and concentrates its strength" as something that narrative does, instead of something that was a survival from mouth-to-mouth rounds of telling and retelling. To Benjamin, the survival of the mouth-to-mouth competency to retell experience, to commit it to memory, was only found in a few exceptional writers, who had themselves

been craftspeople. Newton (1995: 289) refers to what Benjamin (1936: 90) calls “germinative” power. It was not the embedding of story inside narrative form, it was how the storyteller left gaps for the listener to fill in, and did not engage as we discussed above does not expend itself like information in narrative-explication, or like the modern novel in laying out the psychological shading. Newton (1995: 292) says, “Narrative ethics is not merely a property of texts.” Yet, when we read his principles of narrative structure and hermeneutics, it’s all about textual composition, the writing of novels, and not about the sociality of storytelling, in its many stylistic forms. In short, sociality and corporeality, the political economy of printing and publishing – these are always exceptions for Newton.

Newton does not address the sociological or economic context of writing narratives, and the kinds of narrative ethics that are positing as legitimate under corporate rule. It is ironic that Newton (1995: 159) cites Irving Goffman. Goffman is a sociologist, he observes the dramaturgy of social performance, not the senders and receivers of textual material. He is studying the theatrics of image management, the ways in which image is part of the symbolic economy. Goffman is outside the closed system representation of the narrative text, even beyond the intertextual relationships. There is a substitution Newton keeps making for “webs of interlocution” and “webs of exchange” outside the text, for those mimetic ones which novel writers can imprison inside the text (p. 142). For example, Newton (p. 116) argues, “Because exigency lies behind occasions for storytelling in this novel, the stories... perform a narrative ethics.”

The implication is stories and storytelling can only accomplish ethics, when imprisoned in the text of a novel or other literary work. In short, ethics of the novel substitutes for any storytelling in the sociology beyond the novel. Each substitution of surface values for experiences of storytelling in community puts what he cherishes further out of reach. It only further “mystifies intersubjective encounter” (p. 142). Newton (p. 18) says, “Intersubjective responsibilities and claims ... follow form acts of storytelling” yet it is only the textual-mirror of storytelling, not the exploration of the act of storytelling in corporeality that Newton is exploring. And Newton has the very concept the “aesthetic slippage” (p. 142) from the countervailing discourses of the embedded sociology of storytelling situated in community, in organization, and in

political economy down to “narratives proper” (p. 18). Benjamin (1928), for example, in ‘One-way street’ makes the point that ‘literary activity’ is no longer confined to ‘literary frameworks’ in books, but extends to the signs and ads printed all over city streets and shops.

A final exception I want to comment on is the marginalization of turn-taking in ethical behavior. Newton (1995: 114) says “empirical support for ethical behavior in discourse, turn-taking processes, for instance” are in the “metaphysical sense” examples of “pained speech.” Newton wants to remove storytelling as a ‘profane’ kind of expression, part of face-to-face turn-taking, part of spoken discourses not tethered to the physics of the novel. Over and over again, Newton finds the sociology of storytelling behaviors as well as “communal narratives (p. 111) to be not as effective as narrative ethics fashioned in the pages of the novel, and in the minds of the reader turning those pages.

Trace In-Between-The-Lines In looking at the dualities, reversing their hierarchy, setting in play the rebel voices, other side of the story, denying the dominant plot, and finding various exceptions, allows us now to look more closely at what is in-between-the-lines of all these relationships. Between the author’s text and the world of the socioeconomic or corporeality of capitalism, stands the reader. “A theory of narrative ethics entails the perhaps peculiar notion that characters’ fates take place in the presence of readers.” The reader is at a distance between text and character, between reader and character (p. 292).

In-between-the-lines Newton (1995: 140) is swept away by narrative ethers, reading for the ethics of intersubjective registers in “the play of forms” in the novel. The author’s contempt, and pragmatic ethics (p. 139) is supposed to seduce the reader. That is his “ethics of narration (p. 116). It is inherently textual, in narrative acts that are “compelling formulations” in the text (p. 116).

Newton drives a wedge between written words and spoken words not respoken in the text. He depends upon the novel to be the sole harbinger of the “transcendental power of language” (p. 109). Stories always become the ‘private property’ of texts. Only talk that is types is part of narrative ethics. In claiming to be doing “Bakhtinian ethics”

Newton (p. 47) is not exploring the dull spectrum of non-novel stylistics, for which Bakhtin (1981) is known.

Newton's dislike of de Man's deconstruction focuses on his refusal to impart ethics in the views on agency, and in structures of the text (p. 37, 54). Newton accuses de Man of "scrupulous [ethical] hesitation" (p. 37, addition mine), "reified aesthetic formalisms" and "bloodless formalist correctives" (p. 54) and a "nondialogical imperialism" (p. 304). Yet, in-between-the-lines of Newton's text, one could make those same accusations and ask for answerability. Newton does at least part of what he protests in de Man. Newton does claim ethics as the province of hermeneutic theories of narrative textuality and does not look at the dialectic aspects of textuality and orality stylistics. His deconstruction of de Man's ways of deconstruction concludes that de Man ways "convert readers into its [i.e. text's] jailer-detainees" (Newton, 1995: 49). And that de Man "defies the ethical immediacy of human speech" (p. 38). These charges are ironic, since Newton continually jails storytelling in narrative prison, and truncates ethical immediacy of human speech to novel-embedded speech.

Resituation Newton (1995: 290), in passing, says "Narrative ethics range across a spectrum. The Bakhtinian addressivity of utterance that would forge for Newton an intersubjective alliance" (p. 290) is one part of the spectrum. From the above deconstruction, it would appear the sociality of a community of storytellers, who orally tell and retell, and sometimes write, is another important place on the spectrum. To Newton the "force of story" is makes the narrator feel he or she knows the characters (p. 290). In the "force of representation" Newton theorized implicit "representational power" (p. 290). This representational power of narrating comes from translating the Other into a character, and even a fictional one, is as Newton (1995: 291) "fraught with ethical tensions." Yet the sheer experience of telling, listening, connecting one's experience to a telling (making it a co-telling) is part of the power of the sociality of storytelling, its communal aspects, that is more than just the writing of narrative. In narrative and story there is an arbitrary tyranny imposed by authors and, the imprisoned character, the imposed shaping, the very "despotism of form" (Newton, 1995: 291).

My resituation is to look at the question of answerability as interplay of narrative ethics and story ethics. I call for resituation of the narrative ethics project. I call for a story ethics not imprisoned in typeset pages, or in the poetics of text-based hermeneutics.

I want to treat answerability with more ambivalence. I want to question whether reading a text or hearing a storytelling in community, imparts ethical answerability. It would seem, in my experience, that people often time eschew answerability, and even when obviously and self-acknowledged complicity, there is denial of answerability.

Instead of truncating narrative discourse to the novel, and its physics of forces, I would like to suggest we look at the more social, psychological, and phenomenal aspects of storytelling in and between organizations. If we open narrative inquiry to multiplex of written and orality stylistics, as well as to the theatrics of gesture, then we get a more thickly described understanding of the relationship of the limits and exigencies of answerability.

Newton (1995: 24) notes the danger of his collapse of the differences of the “world of the text” and the world of “life—turned-into-story.” He then proceeds to do what he has qualified. Novels reflect upon and mimic everyday and extraordinary life. In short Newton’s project is to compose narrative ethics by reading from great literature (e.g. Dicken’s *Great Expectations*; Faulkner’s *Absalom Absalom*, Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, etc.) responsible obligations in everyday life from varied narrative forms. I argue for looking at the grounded processes of the social, for storytelling-in-use, in the collective processes of everyday life, where the strictures about narrative coherence and form are more grotesque and carnivalistic. Certainly everyday life mimics fictional patterns, and fiction mimics everyday life. The point I am making is to study the interrelationships of narrative ethics (that would run everyday life as novel) and story ethics (that would be more dynamic less coherent than novels, even polyphonic ones). Shifting story ethics into the phenomenal world of everyday life gives ethics and story more ethnographic, sociological, and historical import.

II. STORY ETHICS

We do not get a transcript of our own or Others' stories. My observation is that my living story is in fragments, and my encounters with others' living stories are equally fragmented. Further, I have argued that Newton (1995: 30) *Narrative Ethics* needs to be more than "textual engagement" or that novels reflect all as need to know about social discourse.

I would like to question answerability ethics. People I study who purchase shoes from Nike, or all many of products from Wal-Mart to not seem to feel at all implicated in what goes on in sweatshops of our global economy (Boje, 1999a, b, 2000, 2001a, b, 2006b).

Most agree that many people are hurting, working in horrid conditions, but consumers, and most management academics refuse to be implicated. They refused to be incriminated in anything so onerous as sweatshop. They are not responsible. Since they are not answerable, their reaction poses an ethics problem. Despite rather abundant storytelling in activist websites, and a sprinkling of press stories, people do not feel the worker's plight on their conscience. When I ask my students about this, about half tell me they do not feel compelled to be concerned by stories of workers in far away countries.

Compellent Storytelling What kinds of stories are compelling? Is an answerable story one that haunts us? Is it one that puzzles us? Is it one that keeps unraveling deep secrets? Is it unmistakable tragedies in which we have some complicity, no matter how minor? Must our complicity be explicitly spelled out in the storytelling?

Answers to these questions are about guilt and blame. Many students in my classes, or colleagues at conferences, do not feel answerable, or evoked to acceptance of complicity in what is out of sight, far away, and keep it out of mind. Guilt is not a simple emotion. Guilt may be something that slowly sinks in, over many tellings about this or that condition. Who is to blame for environmental pollution, sweatshop, the bankruptcy of Enron, and the demise of Arthur Anderson – can remain unanswered in the storytelling. Perhaps there is plenty of blame to go around, and everyone is point at others, never themselves.

People psychologically repress and suppress what is disturbing and ads. They defend themselves against claims of answerability. Many corporations committed to

unethical practices have no choice but to defend and to vehemently protect the false idea of their lack of complicity because such a narrative, when compelling, has currency in the marketplace. We have so many places and spaces to decide to be answerable or not. Too much remains unanswered. The systemicity keeps moving and rearranging, and whatever compelling narratives are enacted in one context, does not hold for very long. The truth is always a 1,000 truths. We manipulate our choice of truth by changing perspective, deciding which perspectives to manage as images and which to hide away.

A hint of suspicion enriches the complexity of organization and interorganizational relations, as well as relations between workers and organizations, and customers and organizations. In the face of suspicion, many corporations play it quite seriously. Others play well with the ambivalence. There's no problem here. Many a corporation hides their secrets. Many executives hide their secrets. Many employees and consumers have secrets. We all have suspicions. We live in a web of suspicions. Denial can be an exchange on different registers of emotion and will. Some are vehement and outraged. Others play it unphased, even nonchalant.

The limitation of answerability ethics is that many people do not accept guilt, blame, or complicity. They, for example, may prefer bold denial, and have no discernable sense of conscience answerability for global practices. Many even if they could decipher Figure 1, do not want to know. Their egoism is quite selfish, when it comes to thinking about their relationships to others, especially to Others different in gender, ethnicity, race, class, or economic circumstance. Answerability, then, must deal with how people live with guilt, and keep far way from guilt over any kind of complicity, no matter how compelling the storytelling. Its been my experience that some very intelligent people divorce stories of sweatshop working lives from their persona lives as shoppers, and from stories of fellow workers in the brotherhood of workers globally, whatever their plight. This makes it easy for corporations to sweep the dirt under the carpet by crafting rather compelling narratives. In other words a compelling storytelling is not enough. There are psychological reasons why people just will not be answerable.

Compellent Narrating A proper narrative is thought to have BME, but unless there is participation, can it be compelling? Corporations hire the best talent to craft narratives to be compelling, but are they? They make sophisticated used of double

narration, embedding the narratives of actors and sports stars into the corporately orchestrated narrative. But, is this manipulation of narrative, compelling? Its not compelling when people cannot decipher or deconstruct their own complicity. Nike tells many white lies, one after the other, to avoid its own compellingness in workers' conditions. At least Nike does seem to lie, to those of us in the anti-sweatshop movement, to avoid complicity (Boje, 2000, 2001b, 2006b).

Deconstructing narrative compellingness gets us into a genealogy of narrative moves that altogether is fairly complex. That's the problem with Nike's narrative compellingness, to leave a trail of one over-simplistic alibi-narrative after another, and just keep moving and telling defensively. Nike heads down a path, in my view, one spin after another, and all the time defending its practices, while claiming to be transparent in how it is monitoring sweatshop abuses of its subcontract factories. The path gets more and more complex. What is supposedly transparently presented in narrative to spectators is a way of telling from a certain perspective, or just a plain trickery, faking transparency.

The fakery is one that Newton (1995: 38) clearly identifies, when writers "want readers to hear a polyphony of voices" along side the author's "orchestration of them." The problem is those of us in the movement deconstruct the feigned polyphony, the lack of actual worker voice, in one spin after another, and Nike skips down the path to tell and sell another spin. When we call Nike on its complicity, the answer is 'sorry that way of telling is not us anymore.' Yet, there is a problem for Nike in this. Moving down the path, means setting out one manipulation scheme after another, each a bit more elaborate than the last. A thousand little choices are swept under the rug, and a few come out from under. And when these collide, there can be emergent effects that spiral out of corporate control.

For example, Ernst and Young audits could find no sweatshops in the 1990s. When the narrative shield unraveled in the exposé press, then former ambassador Andrew Young was sent to tell his compelling narrative that there were none. Challenged by Doonesbury cartoon caricatures, Nike skipped down the path and hired various academics to write glowing ethical reports (Boje, 2000; Landrum, 2000a, b). Landrum and Boje (2000) did an ethnostatistic analysis of the invalidity of academic data gathered, statistics methods and rhetorical embellishments by Amos Tuck professors' MBA

students. Nike skipped further along, and caught up with Wal-Mart and Kathie Lee Gifford scandal, formed the Fair Labor Association (what a misnomer). FLA is paid for by corporate fees, and does monitoring studies, taking over the role of Ernst & Young auditors, the infamous Andrew Young's whistle stop tour of Nike factories, and the various academic empiric whitewashes.¹

Nike's current strategy: to suspend disbelief, leave a little bit of culpability showing. FLA monitors actually find and report occurrences of subcontractors engaged in blocking organizing, paying below legal wages, hiring underage workers, withholding overtime payment, physical and mental abuse, etc. Nike is in an amazing position. It can claim to be policing and enforcing its ethical code, but the behavior keeps going on in the same frequency and intensity as before. The lawsuit by consumers in California was won in the court. The court judgment upheld that Nike's transparency rhetoric claiming it had used FLA to curtail sweatshops was too much of an exaggeration. Skipping down the path, Nike claimed that it had protection under the First Amendment of the Constitution to free speech, and that include the right to freely lie in corporate advertising. It was not upheld. Nike did pull most of its Transparency 101 program off its websites. Nike, and many others, still uses FLA reports of sweatshop abuses of its contractors, writing compelling narratives, each time, as to what is being done to uphold ethical standards. It's one choice point after another. At each point is the decision, to lie or truth, to tell a compelling narrative that tidies up one misstep after another, or engage a more complex storytelling. At each point a gaggle of storytellers try to decipher the trail markers.

AND I want to reiterate that its about '*and*' not either/or. We are talking about a dynamic of compelling narrating *and* compelling storytelling. It is just that alibi narrating has this way of trumping compelling storytelling, particularly the compelling participant-storytelling by workers, who speak out to activists, and a few reporters.

There is defensiveness, the presentation of counternarrative to any damaging storytelling, such as a counternarrative of why sweaty globalization practices is part of economic development, part of the road a developing Third World economy must take to get to the top. The compelling narrative offers the spectator, the consumer, managers, and

¹ For a history of monitoring and whitewashing see Boje's website <http://business.nmsu.edu/~dboje/AA/monitors.htm>

contractors closure, that there are no sweatshops, and if there are, well the corporation is not to blame or in any way answerable for that its contractors do, nor should consumers be at all concerned, or any academics, for that matter. Besides, the road to the top narrative claims that if there are sweatshops, well that's the way it should be, the way it ought to be (an ethical claim). The compelling narratives are oftentimes, dominant ways of narrating, and overcome any fledgling storytelling, no matter how compelling. The interplay of compelling narratives and compelling stories is why there can be millions of workers still slaving in sweatshops in the great global economy of late modern capitalism, and very few academics have anything '*critical*' to say on the subject.

III. RELEVANCE TO CRITICAL THEORY ETHICS

It's time to deconstruct Newton's *Narrative Ethics* to make room for *Story Ethics*. I think it is relevant to Critical Theory Ethics, because Newton keeps referring to Adorno, Bakhtin, Habermas, and to Marx. Newton (1995: 14) is skeptical about Habermas' ethical approach to obligation stemming from a universal reason that is self-evident. Newton picks up the gauntlet of answerability from Bakhtin, but restricts it to textuality. He restricts Adorno's concern for authoritarian orders in the 'real' to a matter of "readability" when Adorno clearly, as I have shown, is all about ethical failures of administrative ethics, in organizational and capitalism discourses. Newton sprinkles his text with references to Marx, to "ideological constraints" and to the "bourgeois status quo" (p. 55).

In our book on *Critical Theory Ethics...* we raise an important moral question for the relation of narrative to story ethics. In the corporeality of global capitalism are we not complicit in the production, distribution, and consumption practices of reading and writing? Complicity in storytelling, as tellers and as listeners, is a complex topic, because social behavior in relationships, be they local or global, it's always a moral question.

There are critical limits to answerability, to the thesis that reading a narrative or listening to a storytelling will persuade one to act. There is an assumption that direct participation in reading a story, or participating in an act that is storyable, will result in obligation to do something to bring something more ethical into Being. Adorno and

Horkheimer turned increasingly to Nietzsche to critique administrative ethics and the Culture Industry to explain why workers and consumers, though participants and complicit, were not being *answerable* for changing the system.

I think Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) would call *Business and Public Administration Ethics* forms of “slave ethics” (Nietzsche, 1887/1956: 170-171). Slave ethics, as conscience “in its highest form as behind it a long history of transformations” (p. 192). Ethics is “branded on the memory” of the slave (p. 192). “Whenever man has thought it necessary to create a memory for himself, his effort has been attended with torture, blood, sacrifice” (192-3). Business and public administration ethics is too often an apologetics for cruelty. The pain of “stoning, ... breaking on the wheel, piercing with stakes, drawing and quartering, trampling to death with horses, boiling in oil or wine (these were still in use in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), the popular flaying alive, cutting out of flesh from the chest, smearing the victim with honey and leaving him in the sun, a prey to flies” (Nietzsche, 1887/1956” 193-4). Today’s cruelties are less public spectacles of torture, and more the slow torture of excessive performative, slave wages, and lack of freedom to organize. Yet as Newton (1995: 55) observes about Hawthorne’s novel, *Scarlet Letter*, “allegorical modes of perception can imprison social relations far more effectively than any stocks” or other spectacles of Medieval cruelty. And these allegorical mechanisms transcend the novel, and permeate the social discourses of organization.

I have argued that the answerability thesis is overstated. People avoid the guilt and blame of answerability and addressivity complicity in contemporary cruelty. They engage in denial that they are at all complicit in the cruelty of late modern global capitalism. Nike and Wal-Mart are unashamed of the cruelty of sweatshop life. They tell compelling narratives to counter the marginalized storytelling of cruelty to workers. Sweatshops are characteristics of capitalism’s most cruel centuries. Eith literary fiction’s answerability, people do not rebel against suffering of humans in sweatshops, or animals in slaughterhouses, as long as there is a business ethics of sensemaking apologetics. When the cruelty appears egregious in the storytelling done by workers, then the masses rebel only a little. Indeed business ethics narrates sweatshops suffering cruel working conditions in order to effect national economic progress.

Business and public administration ethicists are completely absorbed in “modern” experience of capitalism, with “no knowledge of the past, no desire to understand it... they presume, all the same, to write the history of ethics!” (Nietzsche, 1887/1956: 194). Ethics is more about damages suffered, and calculated compensations between creditor and debtor. “And may we not say that ethics has never lost its reek of blood and torture—not even in Kant, whose categorical imperative smacks of cruelty? (Nietzsche, p 197).

References

- Adorno, Theodor. 1990. "Punctuation Marks." *Antioch Review* 48, pp. 300-305.
Translated by Shierry Weber NicholSEN.
- Adorno, Theodor W. 1991. *The Culture Industry: selected essays on mass cultured*. J. M. Bernstein (ed) and introduction. London/NY: Routledge. Collection of papers and essays from late 1930s to 1940s, published in German in 1970s.
- Aristotle (written 350 BCE). E.g. (1954) translation Aristotle: *Rhetoric and Poetics*. Intro by Friedrich Solmsen; *Rhetoric* translated by W. Rhys Roberts; *Poetics* translated by Ingram Bywater. NY: The Modern Library (Random House). *Poetics* was written 350 BCE.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1990. *Art and Answerability*. Edited by Michael Holquist & Vadim Liapunov. Translation and Notes by Vadim Liapunov; supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. From Bakhtin’s first published article and his early 1920s notebooks.
- Bakhtin, M. M. 1993. *Toward A Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. Originally notebooks from 1919-1921.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1936/1968. *Walter Benjamin Illuminations*. Hannah Arendt (ed.). The essay “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov” (pp. 83-109) was first published in 1936 (*Oriens Und Okcident*); 1968 is the English translation. NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1928. *Einbahnstraße (One Way Street)*.
- Boje, D. M. 1995. Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as 'Tamara-land'. *Academy of Management Journal*. Vol. 38 (4): 997-1035.

- Boje, D. M. 1999a. Nike, Greek goddess of victory or cruelty? Women's stories of Asian factory life." *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 11 (8): 461-480.
- Boje, D. M. 1999b Is Nike Roadrunner or Wile E. Coyote? A Postmodern Organization Analysis of Double Logic," *Journal of Business & Entrepreneurship*, March, Vol II. 77-109.
- Boje, D. M. 2000. "Nike corporate writing of academic, business, and cultural Practices." *Management Communication Quarterly*, issue on Essays for the Popular Management Forum, Volume4, Number 3: 507-516.
- Boje, D. M. 2001a. *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London: Sage.
- Boje, D.M. 2001b. Carnavalesque resistance to global spectacle: A critical postmodern theory of public administration, *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 23(3), 431-458.
- Boje, D. M. 2006a. *Storytelling Organization*. London: Sage (forthcoming). See online text at <http://storytellingorganization.com>
- Boje, D. M. 2006b. Breaking out of Narrative's Prison: Improper Story in Storytelling Organization. *Storytelling, Self, Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Storytelling Studies*. Vol 2 (2): 28-49.
- Boje, D. M., Rosile, G.A., Durant, R.A. & Luhman, J.T. 2004. Enron Spectacles: A Critical Dramaturgical Analysis. Special Issue on Theatre and Organizations edited by Georg Schreyögg and Heather Höpfl, *Organization Studies*, 25(5):751-774.
- Cai, Yue. 2006. *Story Strategy Dialogisms at Motorola Corporation*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Management Department. New Mexico State University.
- Czarniawska, B. 1997. *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Czarniawska, B. 1998. *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies*. Qualitative Research methods Series Vol. 43. Thousand Oaks, Ca; Sage Publications, Inc.
- Czarniawska, B. 2004. *Narratives in Social Science Research*. London: Sage.
- Gabriel, Y.A. 2000. *Storytelling in Organizations: Facts, fictions, and fantasies*. London: Oxford University Press.

- Horkheimer, Max; Adorno, Theodor W. 1944/1972. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.
Translated by John Cumming. NY: Herder and Herder. 1944 is German
(*Dialektick der Aufklarung* NY: Social Studies Association, Inc.); 1972 is English
edition.
- Illich, Ivan. 1993. *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*.
Chicago, IL/London: University of Chicago Press.
- Landrum, Nancy Ellen. 2000a. "A quantitative and Qualitative Examination of the
Dynamics of Nike and Reebok Storytelling as Strategy." Dissertation, New
Mexico State University, Management Department.
- Landrum, Nancy Ellen. 2000b. "Environmental Rhetoric of Nike." *Academy of
Management All Academy Showcase Symposium on "Time and Nike,"* David
Boje and Nancy Landrum (co-chairs), August 9th, Session #170.
- Landrum, N. and Boje, D. 2000. "An Ethnostatistical Analysis of Nike's Tuck Report." In
Biberman, J. & Alkhafaji, A. (Eds.) *Business Research Yearbook: Global
Business Perspectives*, Vol. VII, International Academy of Business Disciplines,
pp. 614-618. Saline, MI: McNaughton & Gunn Inc.
- Nietzsche, F. W. 1887/1956. *The Birth of Tragedy, and, The Genealogy of Morals*.
Translated by Francis Golffing. NY: Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. 1887
if first German printing; 1956 first English edition, Doubleday.
- Newton, Adam Zachary. 1995. *Narrative ethics*. Cambridge, MASS//London: Harvard
University Press.
- Ong, W. J. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London/NY:
Routledge.