

# Storytelling and Cybersemiotics

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## Abstract

Cybersemiotics integrates cybernetics of von Foerster, Maturana, Varela and especially Luhmann with Peirce's semiotics. Living organizations constitute several kinds of autopoietic and each is a Peircean social-biological interpretant that inhabits the life world. Storytelling also inhabits the life world 'living story' relations, along with the culture world of retrospective narrative, and coupling processes I call 'antenarrative' (preparing in advance before narrative and stories). Storytelling in cybersemiotics is treated as communication in the biological context and the history of species, or as channels of communication, all of which are treated as language games that determine semantic content. My purpose is to put the communication, language games, and semantic content in relation to storytelling.

## Introduction

What is the relation between storytelling and cybersemiotics? In reading through issues of the journal *Cybernetics & Human Knowing*, there have been very few attempts to answer this question. Among them is Carlos Sluzki's (1995). Approach, to unpack 'communication' in cybersemiotics as the transformative process of 'dominant narratives' sustaining problems and 'new stories' that are liberatory in ways that find new system states through therapeutic conversations. Clients in this kind of storytelling therapy can be persons, families, or organizations. For Sluzki (1995: 42) there is a cybersemiotic aspect to all the in Heinz von Foerster's notion of *eigenvalue*. Eigenvalue is a set of scalar solutions derived from transformation of vector space of a matrix that has some nonzero vector (or eigen function solution). Foerster (1978) innovates by including the observer in a recursive approach to eigenvalues, between its text and its denotation. It is this idea that gives Sluzki (1995: 43) entrée into a cybersemiotic understand of how eigenvalues applies to the "process of transformations of narratives that we call therapy".

I need to tweak Sluzki's storytelling approach slightly since he, like many others, uses the terms 'narrative' and 'story' interchangeable. In storytelling paradigm I work within, narratives accomplish retrospective sensemaking that are 'backward looking' generalizing and abstracting within the world of a particular [dominant] culture, whereas 'living stories' are *in situ*, part of 'indigenous' life world which are 'context looking' at what is unfolding 'here-and-now' situationally (Boje, 2001, 2008, 2011a, 2014). Clients are placed in an observer position of the relationship between the dominant narratives of their system (be it work, family, society) that has some kind of grip on their problem-saturated life story. Here and there, Sluzki does treat story differently than narrative, but not consistently. For example, Sluzki (1995:43) says:

"A *story* (I am referring now to a local, isolated story with full awareness that it is as much pragmatic fiction as an isolated family) can be described as a system composed by *characters* (**who** participates in the story, and by implication, the universe of the excluded), *plot* (**what** is taking place), and *scene* (the **when** and the **where** that envelopes characters and plot), all woven together by an *internal logic*, from which emanate *behavioral consequences* (what do we do as a result of that descriptions), *moral/ethical consequences* (in which locus the characters are placed in terms of good-bad, sane-insane, victimizer-victim, etc.) and, of course, *interpersonal consequences* (the relations effects of those guidelines)."

The tweaks I would make to Sluzki's description, is that a 'living story' is local, but never isolated, and it is the cultural narrative that is oftentimes the pragmatic fiction (or illusion) of isolation. I do agree with Sluzki (1995: 43-44) that stories are in "multiplicity" of relations resulting in "*reverberations*" within the systems in which they are enacted. A final tweak it is the dominant narrative-pattern (rather than stable story-pattern, in Sluzki), which I believe enacts its *eigenvalue*, dominant monologic of the narrative within dominant culture.

While a complete review of narrative philosophy is beyond the scope of this chapter, I can provide a brief treatment. The narrative form since before Aristotle (350 BCE) is in the strict form of six narrative elements in a hierarchic order beginning with plot, then characters, theme, dialog, rhythm (or melody), and the

least important, the spectacle (costuming & glitz). For Aristotle, narratives are linear pots with a beginning, middle, and end defining a whole. However, unlike Aristotle's day when plot dominates the narrative ordering, in today's world, particularly in U.S. culture, spectacle is treated as more important than plot or character development, as most U.S. movies and novels do testify. Sluzki's use of scene instead of spectacle, staging as the when and the where, and plot as the what, and characters as the who – calls to mind, Kenneth Burke's (1978) refinement of Aristotelian narrative by which plot becomes the act, characters the actors, theme the purpose, spectacle the scene, and dialog and rhythm are mashed together as the agency. Burke's Pentad, by definition, is the five elements of narrative: act, actor, scene, agency, and purpose. Instead of hierarchic, Burke's contribution is to make them non-hierarchic, so that various ratios can be constructed as ratios, such as the act-scene, the actor-agency, act-purpose and other ratio-combinations of narrative elements. Weick (1995) is more Aristotelian, where in his notion of retrospective (backward looking) sensemaking narratives, there is emplotment of beginning, middle, and end.

I follow Mikhail Bakhtin (1973) and Jacques Derrida (1979), in treating narrative as monological, whereas stories are never alone, and in a webwork of [living] stories. For Bakhtin (1973: 12), "narrative genres are always enclosed in a solid and unshakable monological framework." Story, for Bakhtin, is decidedly more dialogical than narrative, for example in the "polyphonic manner of the story" (Bakhtin, 1973: 60). For Derrida (1979, p. 99-100) views story "as both larger and smaller than itself"; analogous to what we are calling the web of living stories. Finally, I always treat stories as indigenous, as 'living stories' that have a place, a time, and a mind of their own, an aliveness, and are unfolding in the here-and-now, without an end, or a unitary beginning (Boje, 2001, 2008, 2014).

Therefore I treat stories as communal and quite polylogical (many logics) and polyphonic (many-voiced). Living stories are embedded in larger multiplicity of relationships that are dialogical in polyphonic. Narratives and stories are dialogically multi-stylistic (oral, written, dramaturgic, architectural), multi-chronotopic (a mix of various decontextualized adventure narratives, and contextualized folkloric stories). Both narratives and stories are constituted out of

architectonic discourses that for Bakhtin interanimate (see Boje, 2008 for a complete discussion of how these four dialogisms are entangled).

In sum the 'storytelling paradigm', I work in, each dominant narrative has consequences in constraining the nowness of living story by limiting future (antenarrative) alternatives that are possible in the storytelling system. In their social construction of storytelling actors get 'stuck in the past' in problem-saturated (retrospective) narratives that dominate their 'living stories' in the here-and-now, and actors are oftentimes unable to envision or enact 'antenarrative' liberatory futures. The result is their dominant narratives run their life world here-and-now, so that positive future is impossible to imagine.

### **Storytelling and Autopoietic Communication**

Cybersemiotics, in the main, treats storytelling, as either autopoietic communication "that takes place through exchange of matter, energy and information between all components of open systems as well as with their environments" constitutive of social systems (McWhinney, 1995: 31) and/or as part of the semiotics of sign-games in relation to biological cybernetics (Brier, 1995: 5). As Brier (1995: 6) explains:

"In Peirce's semiotics, signs are triadic dynamical processes called semiosis, where the representamens get their interpretants from a semiotic web in an ongoing historical evolution which will over time be able to stand for more and more aspects of the dynamical object. From a biological view, then, meaning is in the bio-social praxis which the sign takes part in."

There are three kinds of Luhmann-autopoieses that Brier works together in relation to Peirce semiotics: psychical, socio-communicative, and biophysical. What follows is my own interpretation of cybersemiotics communication in its bio-social-semiotic praxis in relation to the storytelling paradigm (see Boje, 2018b). My suggestion is the Luhmann autopoietic and the Peirce semiotics, as Brier brings them together in cybersemiotics, has some important contributes to the storytelling paradigm. There is precedent in my assertion that dominant narratives and living stories are different practices in Kirkeby (1997: 42) model of the fusion of event and mind-body, in which in invokes the concepts of 'intext' and 'context. Narratives

constitute the 'intext' form of monologic-plot, while indigenous living story webs of relationship are constituted in 'context', *in situ*, within community and ecology relations. For Kirkeby (IBID.) "This means that we are always confronted with *meaning* – which, of course, was the content of the dual concepts of intext and context. This meaning has got the intrinsic quality always to reveal its own limit when approach through theoretical reflectivity (negative self-reference)." Storytelling can be seen as a "*translocutionarity*" phenomenon of speaking and thinking by "abandoning the authority of the transcendental subject and of the cogito, abandoning the idea of a 'language of thought; before and independent of the spoken language" (Kirkeby, 1997: 17).

Next, I will get more definite about the storytelling paradigm, and then follow up with connections I see to cybersemiotics.

### **What is the Storytelling Paradigm?**

Walter Benjamin (1936) said 'storytelling is coming to an end.' Our competency as humankind to convey living experience from one person to another, mouth-to-mouth, is declining rapidly. Once the traveling storytelling, the seaman, the transporter on land, and the at-home storyteller in a blacksmith or print shop, had the competency to convey experience mouth-to-mouth. With the industrial revolution, factories industrialized, the seaman and blacksmith were forbidden to sing or even to tell stories on company time. Gertrude Stein (1935) did four lectures on '*narration*' at University of Chicago drawing large crowds: about poetry narration, news narration, narrative narration, and history narration. I agree with Benjamin and with Stein: The ancient ways telling living experience are being displaced by the new ways of narrative all about information processing, and not much depth of history. What I have been calling 'living stories' embedded in a place, unfolding in time, in material ways (Boje, 2001, 2008, 2014) is different from what Karl Weick (1995) calls retrospective narrative sensemaking. And I agree with William James (1907: 98), "Things tell a story" because things are 'vibrant matter' (Bennett, 2009/2010a, 2010b). Therefore my short answer is 'storytelling in and around organizations' in sociomaterialism ontology is what Karen Barad (2003,

2007) calls intra-activity of materiality *with* discourse. But there is more to it than that. Let me illustrate with a story of things from my university.

When William James (1907: 96-97) translates “Things tell a story” he is writing the sixth specification of a systems theory, about the *unity of purpose*”

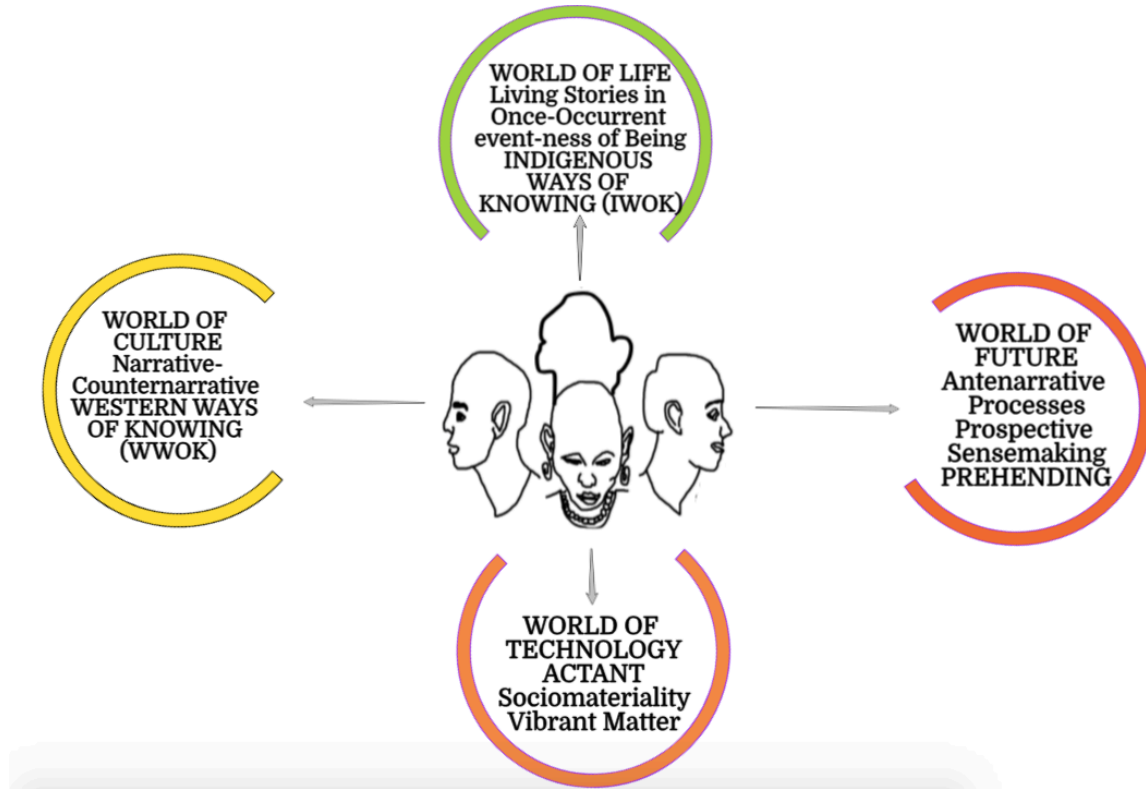
“An enormous number of things in the world subserve a common purpose. All the man-made systems, administrative, industrial, military, or what not, exist each for its controlling purpose. Every living being pursues its own peculiar purposes. They co-operate, according to the degree of their development, in collective or trivial purposes, larger ends thus enveloping lesser ones, until an absolutely single, final and climacteric purpose subserved by all things without exception might conceivably be reached... Our different purposes are also at war with each other.”

James does not claim teleological [narrative] unity, but rather an *aesthetic union* when he states “Things tell a story”:

“... *aesthetic union* among things also obtains, and is very analogous to teleological union. **Things tell a story.** Their parts hang together so as to work out a climax. They play into each other’s hands expressively. Retrospectively, we can see that altho no definite purpose presided over a chain of events, yet the events fell into a dramatic form, with a start, a middle, and a finish. In point of fact all stories end; and here again the point of view of a many is the more natural one to take. The world is full of partial stories that run parallel to one another, beginning and ending at odd times. They mutually interlace and interfere at points, but we can not unify them completely in our minds. In following your life-history, I must temporarily turn my attention from my own” (p. 98, boldness mine).

I treat 'living stories' as unfolding in the present, and with as James puts it, partial stories interlacing making a living story webwork (Boje, 2014). For me, and most narrativists I know, it is narrative that demands an aesthetic unity, a dramatic form of beginning, middle, and end. Bakhtin (1981) says narrative is always monologic, in a narrative aesthetics, which goes back to Aristotle's (350BCE) narrative wholeness of the six elements; Stories, by contrast, are polyphonic. Mikhail Bakhtin (1993: 2) the book of his notebooks written between 1919 and 1921 tells us ‘Culture’-World and ‘Life’-World is not the same and constitutes two-faced Janus, facing in different directions, with no unitary plane between them for

communication. Culture-World looks backward, at the past, that never was, while Life-World looks to the once-occurrent events of Being, here and now, unfolding. I think Janus has a fourth face, I call antenarrative, looking to the future.

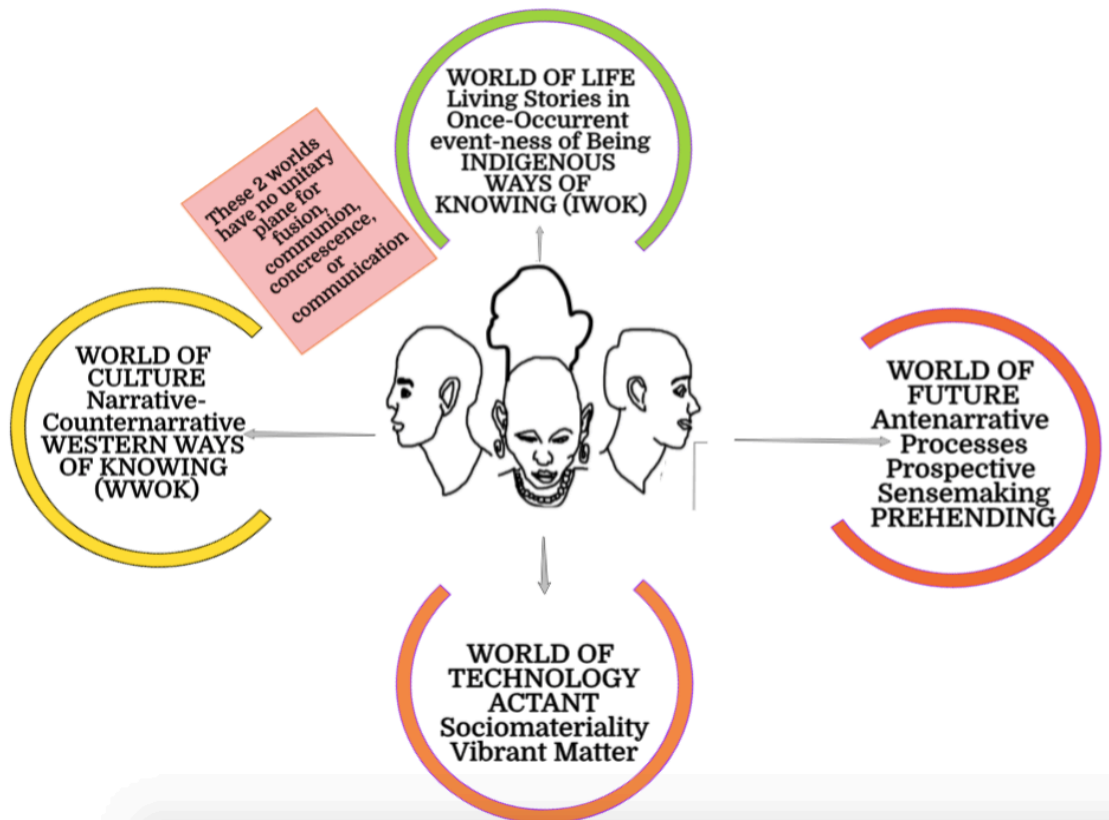


**Figure 1: Four Faces and Worlds of the Storytelling Paradigm**

Antenarrative is constitutive of the living story here and now looking down at present, and the retrospective sensemaking narrative looking backward at the past (Boje, 2014, 2018b). Bakhtin says that the “aesthetic activity as well is powerless to take possession of the moment of Being which is constituted by the transitiveness and open event-ness of Being” (1993: 1). I take this to mean the retrospective narrative in its aesthetic activity of plots and characters is split off from the living story looking down at present, and in its moments of open event-ness of Being. Antenarrative is an ontology process of becoming ante (before, between, beneath, & bets on the future) by looking forward at many possible futures, and enacting one of them in historical act or activity. Narrative by itself is “unable to apprehend the actual event-ness of the once-occurrent event” of living story relations (Bakhtin, 1993: 1).

To the 'World of Culture' of narrative-past, the Life-World of living story 'here-and-now', I would like to focus attention on a third world, the "world of technology", mentioned only once by Bakhtin in his 1919-1921 notebooks (1993: 7). And add a fourth, the Future-World, of very different antenarrative processes. Bakhtin's two-faced Janus is only the World of Culture (i.e. narrative) and the 'World of Life' (i.e. living story webs of relationality), while the three-faced Janus includes antenarrative processes, the prospective sensemaking, and pragmatist sensemaking of looking and preparing in advance, possible futures. Storytelling, therefore, is the Being of event "*in its entirety*" and as "*a whole act [that] is alive*" with antenarrative processes constitutive of narrative and living story (Bakhtin, 1993: 2). The 'World of Culture', its 'special answerability' as judgment validity, and the World of Life, its 'moral answerability' has no community except through antenarrative processes. Bakhtin's special answerability actor does not intervene, merely looks on as the passive bystander, while moral answerability actor in the once-occurrent event-ness of Being actually does enter into the constitutive moment as active, complicit, responsible, and ethical participant in Life-World. In and around organizations we need more moral answerability (Bakhtin, 1990, 1993).



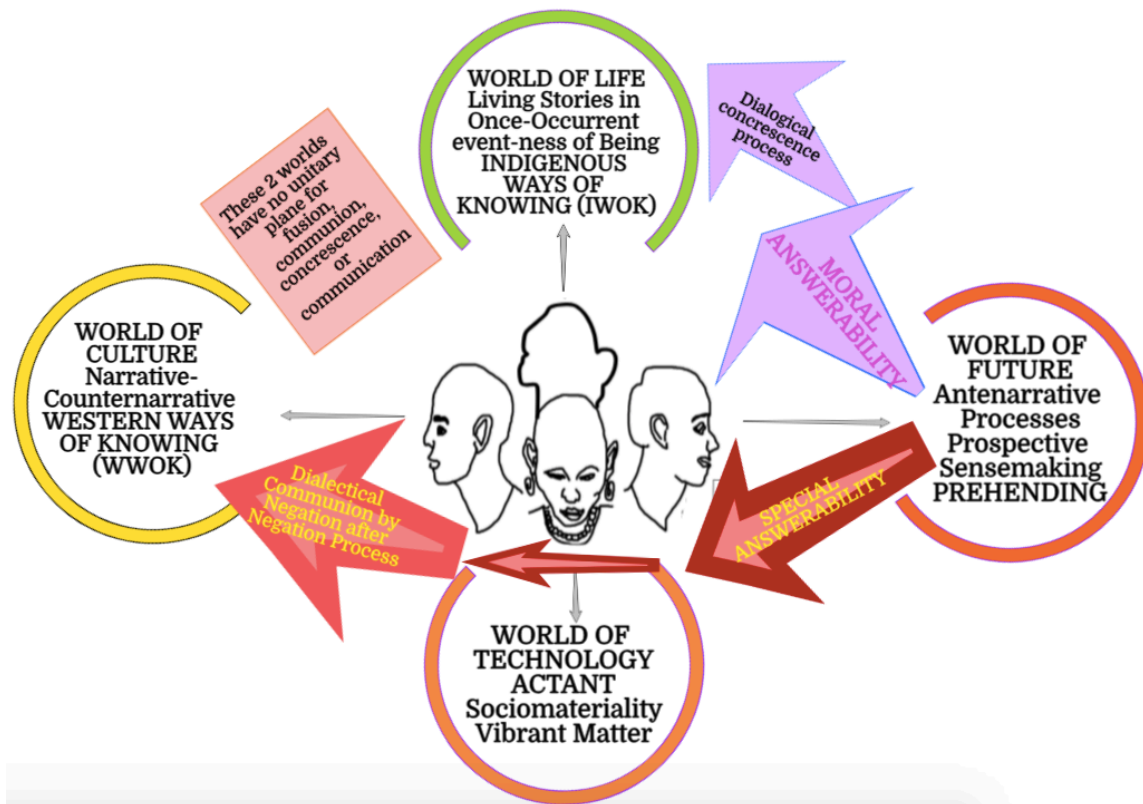


**Figure 2: The Four-Fold Faces and Worlds of Storytelling** (drawing by D. M. Boje)

In the figure I have drawn in the barrier between World of Culture and World of Life that Bakhtin has acknowledged where there is no possible communication, fusion, or concrescence. There is something in the recycling of things, putting those things into the bin-things that points to the relation between aesthetic-narrative, and living-story. Aesthetics rules the decoration of the three Business College buildings, and it's bystander 'special answerability', of people looking on while recyclables are contaminated with trashy material things. 'Moral answerability', by contrast, runs through the living story 'Life World' in which context matters to living story.

Bakhtin's later work (Bakhtin, 1981) stressed the monologic plots narrative, of Culture-World has split from the polyphonic dialogism story Life-World, in all its aliveness, 'living stories', unfolding here and now. I follow Bakhtin (Boje, 2008) as well as the differences between western ways of knowing (WWOK) and indigenous ways of knowing (IWOK) to develop an understanding of the constitutive role of

antenarrative processes in WWOK-narrative and IWOK-living story relationships (Pepion, 2016; Cajete, 2016; Rosile, 2016, Grayshield, 2016; Humphries, 2016; Smith, H. 2017; Smith, L. 2017). My proposition is that these two domains have different antenarrative processes of possible passageways but do not directly interact. WWOK-narrative and counternarrative are ‘dialectical’ opposition processes splitting apart, and IWOK-living story webs are ‘dialogically’ constituted refracting context. Storytelling is also historical and history-making, and as the Business College recycling case testifies, lots of history-forgetting.



**Figure 3: A blockage between 2 worlds and two very different antenarrative processes constitutive of some other worlds (Boje, 2018).**

Above I propose two antenarrative pathways. One is from ‘World of Future’, a pathway of antenarratively moving beneath ‘World of Technology’ to ‘World of Culture’ (& narrative aesthetics) in which a ‘special answerability’ (by-standing) results. The second is a path of ‘moral answerability’ from ‘World of Future’,

antenarratively to the 'World of Life' (& living story webs, of relationality, diffracting context)

Gilles Deleuze (1968/1994) provides us four narrative-illusions that I must introduce to explain why I use 'storytelling paradigm' as inclusive of narrative, and say storytelling in and around organizations, and antenarrative processes. Deleuze's major concept, before all others, is 'multiplicity.' Deleuze differentiates three multiplicities: extensive in spatializing, intensive in temporalizing, and virtual in ways I will relate to 'by-standing' and to those 'aesthetic narratives'. You see, I am an 'ensemble of multiplicities storytelling' professor, and a Deleuzian ontologist recently awakened to four critiques of narrative, for their illusions:

- First Illusion → Representationalism of Narrative:** Thought is covered over by 'image' made up of postulates, and this, for me, is Deleuzian 'virtual multiplicity' a slippage of 'Actual/Real' into the 'Virtual/Real' of representational narrative. This is also a slippage from Platonic world to the world of representation (p. 265) into illusion. 'World of Life' its intensive multiplicity of unfolding living present is not 'World of Culture' of representation of some illusion of 'pure past' (Deleuze, 1968/1994: 81-2). The 'pure past' is an illusion, a virtualizing by narrative aesthetic.

- Second Illusion → Resemblance of Narrative-Culture to Life-World of Living Story:** the subordination of difference to "qualitative order of resemblance", the 'quantitative' copy and the theory-model are the resemblance, and the illusion of good sense (Deleuze, 1968/1994: 1, 266).

- Third Illusion → Narrative covers over the multiplicity play of antenarrative processes:** "Beneath the platitude of the negative lines the world of 'disparateness' ... multiplicity...affirmations of differences" (Deleuze, 1968/1994: 266-7). This extensive multiplicity, spatializing of play of differences is for me, by constituting antenarrative processes, beneath bets of the future, before-between-becoming and constituting narrative and story.

- Fourth Illusion → Narrative as "Subordination of difference to the analogy of judgment"** (p. 269, boldness, mine). Narrative illusion is aesthetic analogy of judgment that Bakhtin (1993, his 1919-1921 notebooks) calls the 'World of Culture; that is a duality with the 'World of life'. The 'World of Life', for me, is the here-and-now once-occurrent Being of event-ness unfolding in living story webs of relationality diffracting context, and those living stories are nomadic, moving, reterritorializing in extensive multiplicity.

Jean Paul Sartre (1986) *Critique of Dialectical Reason* declares multiplicities are totalizing in dialectic ways, of negation of the negation. For Deleuze (1994) multiplicities are just the opposite, something expanding, intensifying, reterritorializing, and deterritorializing.

I assert we need to pay more attention to various kinds of history of multiplicities that are in and around storytelling organization and organizing, and to all the forgetting of history that is happening to multiplicities, to ones that are Deleuzian (nomadic, expansive, intensifying, virtualizing), and others, Sartrean (totalizing, centering, dialectics). For this project on multiplicities, I would like to turn to an essay Walter Benjamin wrote in 1940 that is part of *Illuminations* collection (Benjamin, 1940/1955/1968/2007). My premise in this essay is that storytelling in and around organizations is a contest among multiple dynamic ontologies of multiplicities (Boje, 2018b), histories so poorly understood, so quickly forgotten, that it is leading humanity to a 6<sup>th</sup> extinction because despite all the globalization myths, there is '**no planet B**' (Boje, 2018a). My premise is that people on planet A are not paying close enough attention to living beyond, consuming and producing beyond planetary limits.

Benjamin (1936/1955/1968/2007) in his amazing essay, *The Storyteller*, declared that 'storytelling' itself is 'coming to an end'. And a year earlier Stein (1935) seems to agree that various ways of narration are displacing the ways of telling by those storytellers who could convey experiences orally. Benjamin (1940) gives us insight into ways of telling history, in this subversion of IWOK living story-ability by narration, by WWOK-narrative and its reverence, for textuality. If storytelling itself is changing and our skill at conveying lived experience of the past to another being, is atrophying, then this has implication for storytelling in and around organizations.

Benjamin, believing the Nazis were invading, left Paris for Port Bau Spain. He was en route to the US to join with critical theorists, Adorno and Horkheimer. He died September 26 or 27 1940 in, Spain, either committed suicide when his manuscript was confiscated at the border, or was covertly assassinated by Stalin's murder squad, for not doing dialectical historical materialism properly. Be that as it

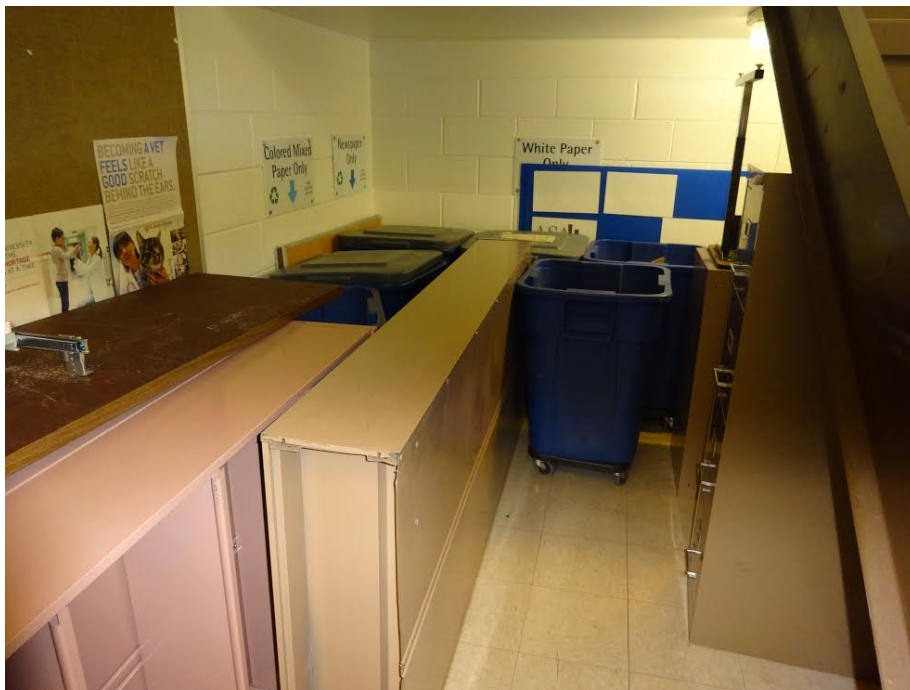
may, Benjamin (1940) just before he died wrote about the interplay of different ways of doing history that can inform our inquiry into the storytelling in and around organizations. These are the types of history I read in Benjamin's work: (1) historical materialism focus on 'material things' telling about the class struggle, differed from (2) historicism focus on the Judgment Day of a redeemer, (3) the chronicler reciting historical events like a rosary bead without distinguishing major and minor ones, with nothing that ever happened completely lost from history, (4) the biologist who looks at human history are but a few seconds on the 24-hour clock of world history, and (5) the soothsayer who inquired into the future.

For Benjamin historical materialism offered a way to critique what Lyotard (1979/1984) later called the progress narrative in his report on education. "The true picture of the past flits by" in the "historical outlook of historicism" is not "the way it really was" (Benjamin, 1940: 255). Microstoria that I wrote about as a contrasting method to historicism (Boje, 2001) uses archives to recover that past without filtering it through the present obsessions. Historical materialism watches both the historicism of the present and the microstoria rescuing of the past as moments of danger. The historicism historian looks at images of the past, which historical materialism claims become the "tool of the ruling classes" (Benjamin, 1940: 255). Microstoria is in danger of resurrecting a 'pure past' which Deleuze (1968/1994) says that never was the 'living present.'" To this we can add that retrospective narrative sensemaking is a conforming past, that is used as a tool of the ruling elite of most every organization, and the counter-narratives of the workers, and the counter-counternarrative of historical materialism is not succeeding in overturning the dominant narrative or the heroic CEO or the rescuing Chancellor.

I would like now to turn to an organization example of how storytelling is embedded in history that is shot through with diverse discourses. I will develop the case of multiplicity of the recycling points on my university campus, and look at its storytelling dynamics, and its cybersemiotics.

***Things tell a story*** Upon return from sabbatical travels to eight countries, I noticed in our university, in the Business College, some things had been moved. The

big 'blue' recycling bins, on wheels, that had occupied a place on the third floor of the Business Complex building (waiting for some donor to give it an endowment in exchange for naming it), those same bins now reside beneath the stairwell on the first floor. *Things tell a story!* When I walked the stairs (many young students take the elevator), to the third floor, I noticed in the place where the recycling things, that *apparatus*, that *actant* → in its place was some black furniture, some chairs too small to sit in, and an empty book case. I began to do some retrospective sensemaking narration (Weick, 1995). I recalled that this was not the first time that big 'blue' recycling bins on wheels, were moved under the stairwell. It is a definite fire hazard. You just do not stack recycling cardboard and paper in a fire well.



**Figure 4: Things Tell a Story - Under the Stair Well at Business College**

There used to be, in 1996 when I first arrived at the university, four blue bins on wheels, neatly inside a wooden casement, where faculty, staff, and students separated cardboard, color paper, and white paper, and newspaper. In 1996 I motivated a Delta Sigma Pi business fraternity pledge class to put stickers on the light switch that said 'switch em off when not in use' and we made posters over the blue recycle bins on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, so people knew what things to throw into what

bin. We also distributed an inexpensive white and colored paper sorting system to each faculty office. About 30% of faculty refused the system, saying that they did not believe recycling made a difference. A decade ago the paper-sorting recycle system was replaced with a single blue plastic container about one foot high. It did not come with instructions so many of us continued to just put both white and color paper in it, and let the recycling center on campus sort it. The absences of the bins, those things missing, tells a story.

### Two months ago there used to be 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Business Complex recycling center, with signage



**Figure 5: The Absence of Things Tells A Story**

About 12 years ago, a new Business College dean, had the wooden casement tossed, and the large blue recycling bins on wheels moved under the stairwell. During the tenure of this new dean (3.5 years in office) the four large blue bins on wheels, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, were moved to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, into the stairwell, resulting in a total of seven under the stairwell. In their place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, was the apparently more aesthetically pleasing bookshelf combination desk with stools. The dean, however, when asked yesterday (Sept 5<sup>th</sup>) did not know why the recycling bins had been removed from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor to behind the stairwell, on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. And when



students in my small business consulting class, asked faculty and staff, they also did not know the history or the reasons for this move. It is, most would agree, another blow to recycling. Someone had decided aesthetics was more important than a properly maintained and spatially located recycling system. I recalled getting an email a month ago, about each of six colleges having some windfall money, left from the downsizing of the staff body and the faculty body, to divide amongst them. I speculated, perhaps the new furniture was 'spoils' of the downsizing. It's not enough data to make an empiric retrospective narrative, because the Business College personnel, faculty, administrators, and students have forgotten recycling system, and were bystanders, looking on at the chaotic remnants of a system that once was embraced.

**Location of Aluminum can/plastic recycling is in Business Complex 1st floor stairwell instead of near larger classrooms on all three floors**



**Figure 6: Under the Stairwell, hidden from the Classrooms, is a recycling station for plastic bottles and aluminum cans, telling its story**

I speculated, perhaps the new furniture was 'spoils' of the downsizing. It's not enough data to make an empiric retrospective narrative. At a more macro-level,



there had been a change in the purpose of the university, and new administrators, and their consultants were reshaping its systems to be more economically efficient, and recycling was being marginalized, under budgeted, and aesthetic bookcases and stools, could attract more tuition-paying students. I was chair of the sustainability council of the university, twice, and worked hard to bring about greater consciousness of how recycling matters. When I taught the leadership course last Wednesday, I noticed another partial story. For the 22<sup>nd</sup> year, the Guthrie Building, classroom wing on the first floor did not have any recycling system at all. I had requested, but been told, again and again, there was no money for such things. I rebelled. I went to the administrative wing of Guthrie building, which once housed the advising center (it was centralized across campus, and moved to other side of campus). I picked up an underused plastic bottle, cans, recycling system, and brought the thing into the other wing of the building, into the class of somewhat surprised leadership students. “Look, this is where you put your plastic bottles and your cans. They do not belong in the trash can.” Go in any classroom of the three buildings of the Business College, and you will find paper, plastic bottles, and aluminum cans thrown into the trash bin. In Spain, Germany, Denmark, Finland, and many other nations, you would be fined for contaminating recycling with the trash. But in New Mexico, there are no fines, and the norms of social conduct are that of the bystander: ‘let someone else worry about it’. After class I put the plastic and aluminum can recycle system, back in the administrators’ wing of the building. I am contemplating antenarrative action, by preparing in advance for a rejuvenation of the recycling locations, adding more bins, and some instructions on what to recycle, but, it is my last semester before I retire, so why do I bother?

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## Domenici Building – recycling is in stairwell instead



**Figure 7 – In another Business College Building (Domenici), a lonely recycling bin, tells its story**

Domenici building used to have two bins in this stairwell and two in another stairwell (4 in total) and now only the one remains.

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In the third of the Business College buildings, ‘Dominici Hall’ there are bins missing, bins never purchased, and this too tells a story.

## Can we find a way to have recycling in main areas (Domenici Building example)



**Figure 8: Domenici Building what is missing in recycling system, tells a story**

There used to be one recycling bin underneath the stairwell (under the word Atrium in the photo) and now none. What do these material stories (Strand, 2012) tells us. Its what Bennett calls an (2009/2010a) 'onto-story' an assemblage of things, in relationship that in is 'vibrant matter' that is the 'force of things' (2004), telling what I call 'living story'. It is also what Barad (2007) terms agential-realism, the intra-activity of materiality *with* discourses of sustainability, university budgeting, and the aesthetics of a university that keeps its recycling containers out-of-view. It is a 'university in decline', a university that cannot sustain its 'extensive multiplicity' of spatially distributed system of recycling stations and bins, or reconfigure their placements as new buildings (i.e. Domenici, is about 6 years old) have materialized. There is forgetting of the past, of the way the recycling system had run years ago, earning many accolades and awards. In 2008, my university, NMSU receives the Post-Secondary School Recycling Program of the Year Award

from the 'New Mexico Recycling Coalition (NMRC)'.<sup>1</sup> "The goal of the NMRC is to have waste valued as a resource, and their award recognizes those who work to promote recycling and composting throughout New Mexico" (IBID.). What is interesting is there is no history kept on the site after 2008.

**University Systems in Decline** Public universities are being run like businesses, and this is happening around the world. Business consultants are being recruited to make it happen. For example, September 2015, the then Chancellor commissioned Deloitte consultancy, at a cost of \$622,700, to spend five (some say ten) days with our university's Board of Regents. The consultants came up with a dandy PowerPoint based on cutting and pasting some university budget data, and advised the Regents to set up six task groups to do actual implementation: To downsize both staff and faculty bodies, to reorganize broader spans of control, collapse administrative and academic units, trim some vice president's assistants to assistants, and to implement business process reengineering to save countless millions. At a recent department meeting I attended on August 17 2018, I learned that our university, its Board of Regents, did all that collapsing, downsizing, and increasing its spans of control, consolidating resulting in nineteen administrative units, and saving \$12.1 million. I suspect this is where the aesthetically-challenged furniture was financed, and displaced the big blue recycling bins on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the Business Complex building. No malice, no conspiracy, it's a matter of forgetting why a recycle bin system was in place, forgetting the history of sustainability systems, in order to, attract students with a more visually pleasing aesthetic.

The administrative order now spends about \$1 million a year to advertise locally on billboards, placing ads in movie theatres claiming our university has 'no limits, no boundaries', and there is to be a shopping mall, a new golf course, and a hotel to encourage enrollment. Other millions were divided among six deans to do whatever they wanted to their colleges. A few short years ago, my department had 17 faculty members and a solid doctoral program. When I leave the end of December, six faculty members and a department head assigned by the dean, from

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<sup>1</sup> NMUS history of recycling accessed Sep 5 2018 at <http://nmrecycle.org/>

some other department, will remain. My own answerability ethics has switched from 'moral answerability' to the retiring bystander with only 'special answerability'. Our university is not alone. Taking a moral answerability stand meant leading votes of no confidence, holding a wake for the doctoral program, writing articles, giving speeches, and actually marching in protest (Boje, 2017c; Boje, Cai-Hillon, Mele, 2017; Boje & Cai-Hillon, 2017).

Our university is not alone in making the transition from being a public university for the public good to being run as a business with profit centers, including the new golf course, shopping mall, hotel complex, under construction. For example, at McKinsey went to Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU). Chancellor Steven Rosenstone hasn't revealed what McKinsey & Co. consultancy produced for its \$2 million contract:

"MnSCU also released materials McKinsey produced to help the system launch an overhaul earlier this year. MnSCU officials say the company worked hard and provided guidance, not prescriptions, for a campus-driven process. But faculty and others say they remain troubled. The work took place away from public scrutiny, which, they say, makes it harder to size up its value. It didn't help that MnSCU recently provided a McKinsey proposal for the project that was almost entirely redacted... McKinsey also helped pen a "change story": an open letter to faculty, staff and students urging them to be bold in tackling changes and promising transparency. It created an engagement plan and provided training to administrators"

McKinsey did similar consultation at Columbia University and University of North Carolina with similar result of increasing academic capitalism by using business consulting firms to implement austerity programs (IBID.):

"...Columbia University faculty members criticized an unpublicized \$1.1 million McKinsey report that had recommended some graduate tuition increases. At the University of North Carolina System, a \$2.6 million McKinsey report on eliminating academic program duplication was not discussed by the governing board or a strategic planning committee, according to media reports."

What these consultancy projects with universities (Deloitte at Kansas State University and NMSU, McKinsey at Minnesota State Colleges, Columbia University,

and University of North Carolina) reveal is a disturbing trend in higher education that includes lack of transparency, circumvention of faculty governance, a quick fix approach to downsizing and business process reengineering. And each new chancellor/President/Provost has to have their own consulting firm do it all again. My point is that much harm results from the storytelling in and around universities that legitimates these quick fix, cut-and-paste, PowerPoint and Xcel spread sheet consultancy reports used to legitimize downsizing and reorganization strategies Boards of Regents were going to do anyway. Most every new chancellor hires a consulting firm to do it all over again, tossing out years of implementation of the last chancellor. So it was no surprise when yet another new chancellor announced he would bring in his own consultancy firm, and also expand the upper administration, and run the university like a business. As the new chancellor at our university, Dan Arvizu, puts it this way:

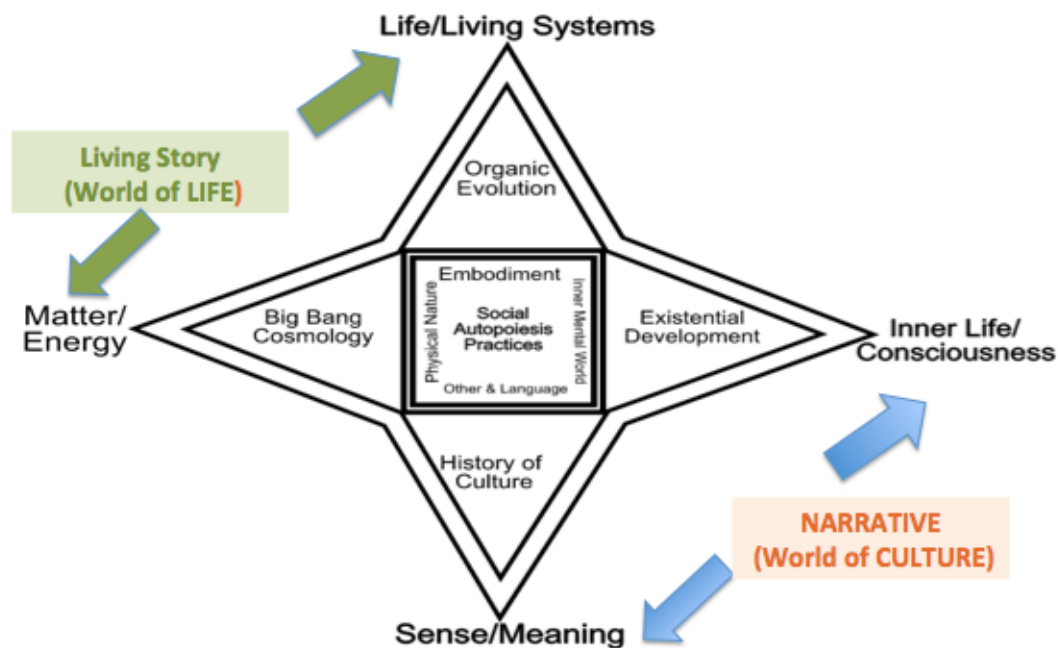
“Essentially, we’re running it like a business,” Arvizu said. “This is what you would do if you were in the private sector and running an organization through a set of outcomes. It’s challenging to do in academia, I get that ... but we’re moving in that direction” (Chancellor Arvizu plans to manage NMSU 'like a business' Algernon D'Amassa, [Las Cruces Sun-NewsPublished 3:14 p.m. MT July 28, 2018](#)).

This movement of private sector ‘Totalization’ is called ‘academic capitalism’ (or ‘neoliberalism’ Ideas) establishes a dialectical Reason narrative expression in the universities around the world to be run like a business. And it is happening around the world, to universities, for example, in Denmark, downsizing the humanities faculty so as to preserve and expand the science, engineering, and business faculties (Bülow & Boje, 2015). The narrative framework of this ‘*university=business*’ totalization is “the negation of the negations [that] becomes an affirmation” of a counternarrative dialectic, the socioeconomic ‘Idea’ that the university is a ‘risky’ business subverting the public good into a private good, and one quite wasteful, in which placement of recycling bins recedes to lower and lower priority, and to quite faint remembrance (Boje, 2017c; Boje, Cai-Hillon, Mele, 2017; Boje & Cai-Hillon, 2017).

## Discussion of Storytelling and Cybernetics of Recycling

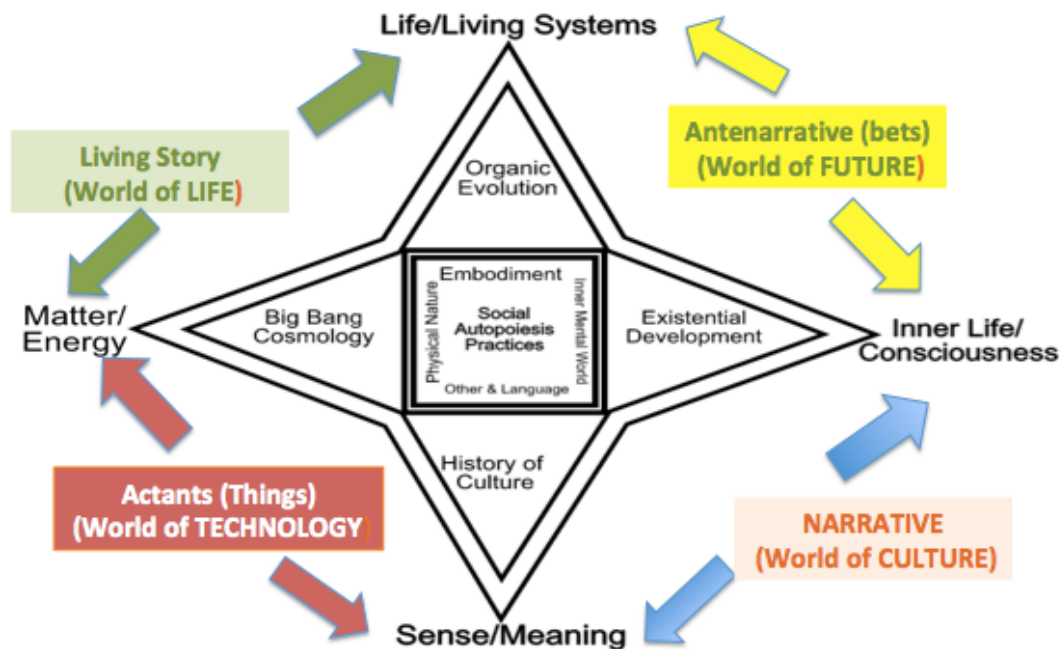
Consumption and production are human routines, consuming and producing 'things' (Sele & Grand, 2016). Recycling technology includes the equipment, bins, and other tools to make consumable things get sorted so it does not all end up in the landfill. Antenarrative means 'preparing in advance' for the future, choosing a 'bet on the future' and antenarratively preparing which future to attend, to observe, and to actualize. 'Prehension' is an antenarrative concept that means grasping some 'thing', taking control of things, to manage the future. The 'World of Culture' produces a 'World of Technology' that generates the capacity for wasteful consumption in the 'World of Life', which, in turn kills the 'World of Life', faster than we can RECYCLE, REDUSE, REUSE. We are therefore on a slippery slope, a downward spiral. Besides killing wildlife, plastic and other debris damage boat and submarine equipment, litter beaches, discourage swimming and harm commercial and local fisheries. The problem of plastic and other accumulated trash affects beaches and oceans all over the world, including at both poles. Landmasses that end up in the path of the rotating gyres receive particularly large amounts of trash.

Here is how I see storytelling participating in Brier's 'Cybernetic' Star model (see Boje, 2018b), to which I positioned 'World of Life' and 'World of Culture'.



**Figure 9: How Storytelling (2 of the Worlds) relates to Brier's Cybersemiotic Star model**

It is possible that the storytelling paradigm can contribute something important to how the 'World of Culture' its narratives, its shall history of culture, relate to how 'things tell a story' and the living stories of the 'World of Life', grounded in the context of a world how humanity is coming face-to-face with sixth extinction (Boje, 2018a).



**Figure 10: How Storytelling Paradigm and Cybersemiotics are Entangled**

Cybersemiotics relates to what (Brier, 2013: 220) calls “theories of the phenomenological life world and the hermeneutics of the meaning of communication seem to defy classical scientific explanations.” My approach enters the phenomenological ‘World of Life’ constituted by living story webs and communication is unpacked as hermeneutics of how pre-narrative (antenarrative processes) and pre-story (antenarrative processes) are in hermeneutic relationship. Cybersemiotics, for Brier (IBID.) is “starting in the middle with semiotic cognition and communication as a basic sort of reality in which all our knowledge is created and then suggests that knowledge develops into four aspects of human reality.”

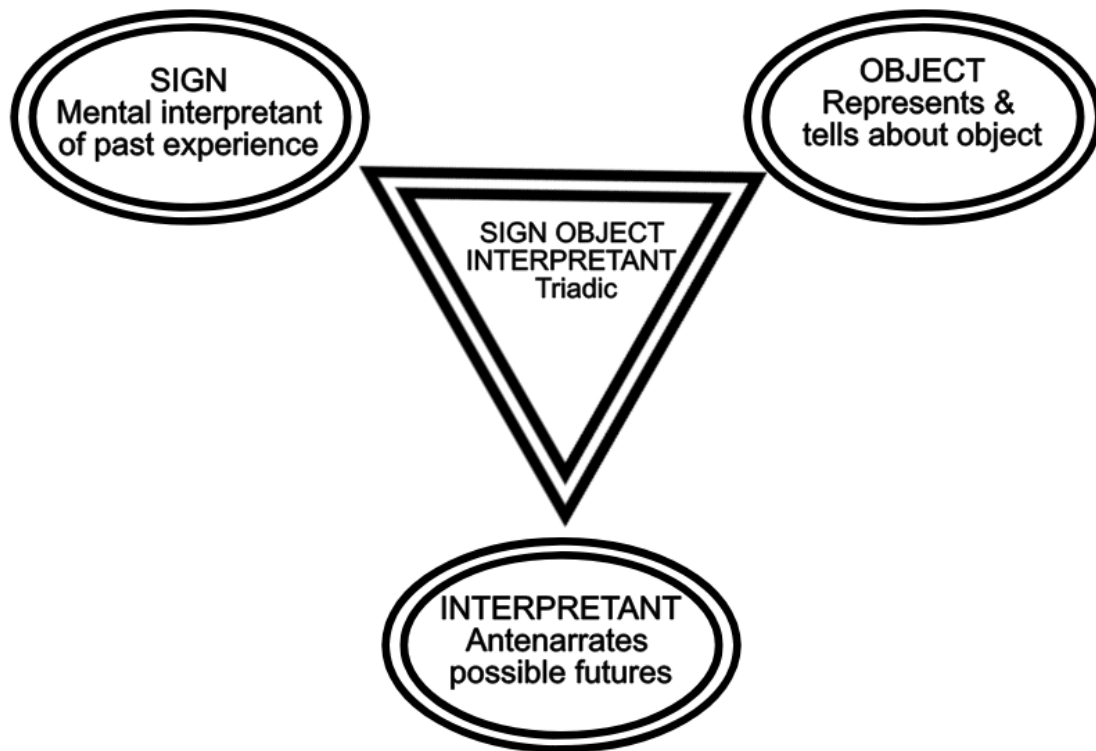


What I am proposing is the living stories (indigenous) are also the biological/physical/nature world of things, 'things tell a story'.

## **Conclusion**

Walter Benjamin (1936) said, "Storytelling is coming to an end" because the skill to tell a living story and to listen and understand living story is less than it was. Why? For a long time, workers no longer allowed to sing together or tell 'living stories' while they work. Because of the rise of 'Western Narrative' that is disconnected from context, ungrounded to Mother Earth, to IWOK storytelling of relation of 'World of Life' to ethical answerability giving way to 'World of Culture' to how 'World of Technology' will save us from ourselves. The 'World of Technology' has turned digital, and is merging with the virtual multiplicity, in ways that is radically changing the 'World of Culture' and making 'World of Life' increasingly unsustainable. The 'World of Future' is foreboding.

This storytelling paradigm, I have introduced, has implications for cybersemiotics. 'Brier's (1995) 'cybersemiotics' integrates Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics (both numeric- and qualitative-multiplicity of open series of some 24 triads) with the autopoiesis of Niklas Luhmann's cybernetic 'closed' systems theory of three autopoieses. Cybersemiotics, by my reading, can benefit from integration of IWOK-living story knowledge and WWOK 'Narrative of the Other-intersubjective with BEING' in the Natural World of BIOLOGY/MATTER/ENERGY, the 'World of Life'. The sign, in cybersemiotics, is anything that communicates meaning. The thing, tells a story about some-thing happening, moving, reassembling vibrant things. 'Interpretant; refers to a sign that serves as the representation of some thing.



**Figure 11: Triadic of Sign-Object-Interpretant**

Narratives, living stories, and antenarratives processes make what Barad (2003, 2007) calls agential cuts in the multiplicities (extensive, intensive, virtual), by making a boundary, of what is in and what is out. The sociomaterial is entanglements of things *with* discourses (ecological, economic, ethical, aesthetic, cognitive, and so on). In the ‘storytelling paradigm’ dominant narratives, living stories, and antenarrative processes are what Barad terms ‘material-discursive *intra-actions*’. My contribution, in this chapter, is that we can acknowledge the systems contribution of William James (1907: 98) ‘things tell a story.’

Not just people tell living stories

**Things tell a story**

Assemblages of things tell a multiplicity story

**Pictures tell a story**

Stuff you recycle or toss in the trash, tells a story

**Things in your organizing multiplicity, tell a story**

Things are *actants* mediating our human routines in and around organizations

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