Games Workers Play in Middle School:
A Dramaturgical Study of Quantum-Pragmatism

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Abstract

We live on a plastic planet eating plastic food, drinking water in plastic containers leaching chemicals, and using plastic utensils. Meanwhile our open systems theory hermeneutics is ill equipped to deal with this plasticity. According to Zygmunt Bauman (1978) there are quite a few different hermeneutic approaches among sociologists and phenomenologists from Marx, Webber Schutz, Manaheim, Husserl, Parsons, Heidegger, Garfinkel, and Schopenhauer. My contribution is to look two more pragmatist hermeneutics, that of the empiricist-pragmatist and the quantum-pragmatist. Parsons (1956), according to Bauman has disenchanted systems [open] systems theory. As a student of Louis R. Pondy, who 38 years ago, invited me to look beyond open systems theory, these two pragmatist hermeneutic approaches (empiricist and quantum) are a way towards enchantment. The old and new pragmatist look well beyond monist open systems theories of my mentor Lou Pondy. William James (1907) empiricist-pragmatist hermeneutics addresses problems with monist linear-hierarchies of system-types by challenging it as an idealism, and posing an option of empiricist partiality of what I have called systemicities (Boje, 2008). James tries to mediate between tender-minded epistemic spewing, such [open] systems logics, and the tough-minded empiricist (logical positivist) out to verify them. Dewey (1929) made a pragmatist turn and proposed a '*quantum-pragmatist*-hermeneutics,' which asserts subatomic particles are intertwined with acts of observing and Heisenberg's (1927) *Uncertainty Principle*. These two hermeneutic approaches are applied to middle schools in a southwestern state, and to ways to shatter the illusion of open systems thinking, that is at least partially ethically answerable for this monstrosity.

Introduction

Life expectancy in past two centuries has been such that children live a bit longer than their parents' lifespan. That has changed. According to a report in the **New England Journal of Medicine,** due to a continuing rise in childhood obesity, children will live five years less than their parents' lifespan (Olshansky et al, 2005).

After about a year, our university IRB is in force. I am at liberty to convey a grounded living storytelling of food in our Las Cruces public middle schools. Hermeneutics is simply speaking, the science of meaning, the processes of interpretative moves, along a cycle, or hermeneutic spiral. I will suggest here that the hermeneutics of

Williams James (1907) pragmatism is decidedly empiricist, even though it calls into question the kinds of ideal-type systemicity that Pondy and Mitroff (1979) as well as Boulding (1956) advocate in linear-hierarchy of nine system (ideal) types. Further, my reading of John Dewey, in his later work (1929) moved away for an earlier (1909) empiricist-pragmatist position consistent with James (1907), because Dewey was integrating his interpretation of Heisenberg's (1927) *Uncertainty Principle*, including the *Observer Effect.* This suggests that instead of one pragmatism, there are at least two, the empiricist-pragmatist and the quantum-pragmatist. I will assert the two pragmatisms give different readings of the Las Cruces public middle schools' lunchrooms.

Both pragmatisms move beyond open systems theory (Pondy & Mitroff, 1977; Boulding, 1956). A rationalist open systems theory adopts an epistemic hermeneutics circle that looks to an ideal system being opposed by finite editions of the timeless (Kantian *a priori*)"absolute world" (James, 1907: 172). It then invites the empiricist to use some ground open systems theory and vitrify the stages empirically. I prefer the term 'systemicities' to 'system' because it emphasizes a radical pragmatist plurality standpoint, rather than the monoist open systems theory monologic relational connections (input-throughput-output-feedback-environment). James would call me a "radical pragmatist" because of this plurality, and I see many systemicities, the "unfinished, gaining in all sorts of places, especially in the places where thinking beings are at work" (James, 1907: 168). In other words, I see systemicities ontologically, Being-in-the-world from a Heideggerian perspective, and doubt the epistemic claims and empiricist verifications. The other aspect of radical pragmatist hermeneutics is that it not stuck in retrospective sensemaking cycle that assumes the past nows replicate into present nows, again and again, the same as before. Rather, the radical pragmatist standpoint on time, is a systemicity is spirality, rather than circle, spiralness still awaiting "*part of its complexion from the future*" (ibid, p. 167). James disputes single discourse, causal unity, unity of purpose, unity of aesthitics, etc that is characteristics of open systems thinking.

The anarchistic character of the radical pragmatist is to unravel all the successive man-made wrapping of systemicities, rather than to assume a singular, monological, open system. We are studying middle school food systemicity, the anti-systemicities of the raw, organic, and unprocessed food movements, as well as something I call 'antesystemicities.' An antesystemicity is defined here as the antecedents, those 'befores' and 'bets' of the double-antenarrative (Boje, 2001, 2008a & b, 2011, 2012 1 to c). In pragmatist hermeneutics the inquiry is into the relation of antesystemicities (complexion from the future) being added and grafted onto systemicities, and onto anti-systemicities. This for me, is not a hermeneutic circle of recurrence of sameness cycles, in middle school food systemicity, rather a hermeneutic spiral with amplifications and contractions. James describes the hermeneutics of antecedents (predicates; flux of sessile reality) becoming turned into objectified subjects by a process of human addition.

A radical quantum hermeneutics goes beyond open systems theory, by treating materiality in relation to human additions, adaptations, reinterpretations, etc. Quantum hermeneutic spiral traces how the grafts of each new systemicity are assimilated, adapted to the food systemicity that is already there in the middle schools. Faked and superficial food is madd from additives, from genetically modified and reengineered splicing of food molecules, crossing species, without much regulation, in fact, by a cooped institutional oversight that relies of agribusiness to test their own food concoctions. The systemicity

has grown so absurd that children are required to eat a minimum of calories instead of eating healthy nutrition foods. The food instead of being quantumly-organic, is man-made, instead of naturally grown, it is grown from genetically modified terminator seeds, which are treated as intellectual property.

Both a pragmatist and a quantum hermeneutic spiral peel back the "plasticity" (James, 1907: 159) of the man-made food. It is not only plastic-wrapped, served on plastic trays, eaten with plastic utensils, but the food itself s laced with plastic ingredients, plastic subatomic particles, as the plastic leaches into the precious little natural food, from the insecticides to soil additives, to the food-processing, food-preparation, and food-servings. It takes a good deal oppressions, omissions, and exclusions in-order-to treat middle school food systemicity as an open, organic, living system theory. Open systems theorists expect to find a single food system, open to its environment, a complex adapting system, but the pragmatist and quantumist finds a plurality of systemicities, grafted onto one another, partial implementations of food policies by the nation, state, and school boards. The antesystemicity proceeds by antecedent processes, as language of 'mad'-made food things turns into plasticity, and a 2nd law of thermodynamics of some open system rationalization becomes hard to abide. Open systems thinking is what James (1907: 157) would certainly call "a queer sort of petrified spins" and "the idol of the rationalistic mind." The rationalist open systems theorist understands by retrospective rationalization in a *telos* that makes the plasticity of food seem sensible. The pragmatist turns towards the future when middle school food is just plastic, and the sum total of all the food additives and quantum transformations is just food plasticity in a plastic world. The world is turning to plastic.

This is because we cannot possible recycle all the plastic water bottles, plastic food wrappings, and all those plastic forks, spoons, and knives. They form swirling vortices in our oceans, and food for marine life, also imported into the food systemicity of the middle schools. This is not news, "not for one who know the latest revelations of the story" (ibid, p 146). There is a pragmatic connection of food with life in the living stories of this spiralness of the *ante rem* (all that is antecedent) in food habits, the food ways of middle schools.

An Interim result of the Dramaturgy of Institutional-Matrix Social Influence

We are halfway through the project. The traditional description of the public school lunchroom, tending food has largely been characterized as a passive profession. The food-tender or food-worker has been seen as a distributor of food and drinks and as a person ultimately responsible for order in the cafeteria. In the enactment of feed-tending and order-keeping tasks, workers are usually described as peripheral to the existence of the social world of the lunchroom, as persons, who at best, will listen to student's talk or troubles, but never become involved, unless a fight is happening. Our research suggest, that food-tending is far more complex, as these tasks stand at the center of three kinds of institutional crossovers, or chiasms as Merleau-Ponty (1968) calls them:

1. Crossover between body and world
2. Crossover between perceiver and language
3. Crossover between word and its meaning

The school lunchroom managers and workers are there to serve food, and to do so in a manner that reflects the rules and norms of federal and state institutions such as USDA, Department of Education, Local School District, etc. Not follow the rules offers the real possibility of serious institutional consequences. No food-tender wants students to consume food that is not healthy for them, or to develop a bad school reputation for not following federal, state, and district rules or norms. Accordingly, food managers and works must create an atmosphere in which students keep eating and drinking, yet satisfy the legitimate rules of varied institutions, less the school becomes in violation of their policies and norms. At the same time food-tenders (managers, cashiers, janitorial food disposal workers) are engaged by not waiting passively until disorder arises, and situations get out of control. To create an orderly lunchroom world, the student energy is channeled to be appropriately expressed.

This is not reflected in the empiricist-pragmatist food counters. We have done the pretests in three middle schools. This is one example, in a school Debra Bauer, Vanessa Martinez, and I studied on Feb 20th 2013. The two cashier work with students to insure, in compliance with USDA and Department of Education policy, the students take a fruit cup, plastic sack of veggies, or topping if they selected the hamburger entrée. This day there were five entrée choices.

Table 1: Pretest Observations in One of the Middle Schools

Grade	Took Both Fruit and Veggies	Fruit Cup Only	Plastic sack of Carrots and Celery sticks only	Tomato Lettuce for the Hamburger	None (especially then shelves not restocked)
6th	4	43	9	0	2
7th	4	50	2	3	3
8th	6	59	2	1	1

In this empiricist method of pragmatist, we study the pretest data, do some action research interviews with workers and students, then do an intervention, such as changing food display, signage, or training, and assess the resultant increase (or not) of food choices. I want to turn attention to the other type of pragmatism, the quantum variety, where we are addressing the repercussions of food rules and policies of a variety of institutions (called Institutional Matrix) on the waves of social processes enacted in the lunchroom.

Table 2: Institutional Matrix Relationship Affecting the Lunchroom

INSTITUTIONAL-MATRIX	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.Federal USDA ($32 billion in food)	X									
2.Federal Dept. of Agriculture		X								
3.Federal Department of Education			X							
4.NM Dept. of Ed				X						

5. Food processors				X					
6. Food Management Service					X				
7. Fast Food Corporations (ads and packaging)						X			
8. LSPS District							X		
9. NMSU faculty and student researchers								X	
10. LUNCHROOM of Middle Schools									**X**

Tending food thus involves the strategic manipulation of student energy into a social order where encounters can occur without threatening consequences to student or school reputation (Bell, 1976). This article will show that in the case of food workers (managers, cashiers, janitors), the accomplishment of this process is brought about through artistic performance, in other words through 'food games.'

In particular, this article will begin by formulating a theory that underlies the adequate fulfillment of the food-tending role, by which school personnel and students make sense of and accomplish their social world. It is a game playing process contextualized in terms of the rules of the game settled in actual practices and pragmatic actions, that invest a Matrix of Inter-Institutional relations about rules, within the existential reality of the lunchroom. Finally, these patterns of worker performance will be examined as institutionally constituted game performances aimed at investing school lunch social world with 'playful' reality and artistic stylistic performances reminiscent of Dennis Roy's (1956) classic article, 'banana time.'

The data on this this article is bases was obtained as part of a two-year research project on the nature of storytelling communication in three Las Cruces New Mexico middle schools. One year to get the information for the IRB and its approval, and now in the second year, using participant observation and interviews with key food-tenders and students, in the school lunchroom setting, and doing document content analysis of federal, state, and school district texts to ascertain the norms and rules of the game, as set by policy makers.

The three middle schools are located in neighborhoods where Spanish is the language spoken at home in 57% of the households. New Mexico is one of the poorest states in terms of families living below the poverty line. The school and its workers, managers, cashiers, janitors, principals, teachers, and students, present a stage designed to show order and social control to the outside world, not only to parents, but to an institutional matrix setting policies.

The best food-tenders are able to get into the games and make the lunchroom a controlled and orderly place and time, but also a lively and fun place to be. For example, as one food-tenet commented on another's work:

"Al works a nice food disposal station. You get in line and he talks with you about the food. He's friendly until 'middle kids' get out of line, and then he is in their face, to keep down the mess."

The basis for successful role fulfillment is an awareness that tending-food is more than passing out the food, it is keep order, and seeing that 'middle kids' play by the rules. Al's food-tending has occupational hazards, as the food and drink is tossed about, I as a researcher had to step out of the way, and when I didn't the milk from a flying milk carton, spewed all over my iPad. The work looks easy, until you get in a fast moving line, and food flies every which way. Then Al steps in and starts his games. Unlike, Roy's banana time, these are food games, that are not just for fun, or a way to find satisfaction in an otherwise dull and boring job. The experienced food-tender sets a socially constituted frame of activities for game work, an active involvement in social life of the lunchroom. The performance of the student role follows from being in various lines: to pay the cashier, to choose entries, fruit or vegetables, and a drink, then after eating, get in line to dispose of food waste in one nine, plastic in another, and put unopened fruit and veggies on the table, and the tray in their own pile. The perception is that this food sorting just happens. Yet, if the food-tender is away from their post, the 'middle kids' take advantage, and stop sorting, and everything including the plastic serving tray goes into the trash.

Our contribution is to treat the consciousness of workers' and student's role performance as an important factor in a dramatic exchange that is theatrical framing brought to bear in accomplishment of social order, and the Matrix of institutional rules of the games played out every school day. The ability to improvise in dramaturgy is important so things don't get crazy, out of control, and all sorts of institutional norms get violated, thus affecting the reputation of the school, and the district.

This theatric is demonstrated in the manner in which several food-tenders enact strategic courses of action with students playing their role in creating life and evoking energy in the lunchroom. The food-tender will gesture, raise their voice, talk to a 'middle kid' directly, so as to manage order. This serves institutional interests in framing by theatre the roles of a viable social life, where eating and drinking are available in fulfillment of social times of consumption.

This is a pragmatic systemicity of action (Boje, 2008), where food-tenders establish relationships with regular student patrons of the lunchroom. Each food-tender is more or less consciously aware of the construction and maintenance of a network of student regulars, so they can set the theatric framework for stable and continuous social order (Bell, 1976: 99).

The food-tender best something happening, to keep the line going, by manipulating the existent structure of student awareness by creating a discourse game, that frames the action and involving students in a social definition of the line situation, where rather than bystander watching, they are actively engaged in social life. For example, if Al, starts an interview game, by asking kids, "why didn't you eat your fruit?

This professor standing here is taking a survey," then he has engaged not just the student, but recruited me to plan in the game. We have intervened in the social life of the students, setting the acting roles, mixing it with researcher methodologies of participant observation, generating and keeping order in social life. During such encounters, 'middle kids' were shy, and di not have much to say, beyond the nod of the head, the shrug of shoulders, or on rare occasion, of "I don't know," "I don't like the taste," "there was not enough time today," or "I made a choice to not eat fruit."

A line that is disorderly, with students tossing half eaten food, full and empty containers, and empty plates every which way but where they go, is not fulfillment of institutional norms or rules.

The food-tender techniques for generating order during their work shift are aimed at draining students into an interactive web. The food-tender is actively conscious of ongoing conversations, line actions of students cutting line, in order to draw them into existing interactions by expanding the boundaries of conversations. Thus Al moves about in the lunchroom, moving full waste containers, getting ice packs for the full milk, boxing some of the fruit cocktails, and veggie packs for the after school program. As there are only 12 participants, the 150 or so returned fruit cocktails, is too much, and during idle moments, he returns to the line to empty all be 12 into the pig slop. Al greet a regular patron, and raps with them (having a conversation) asking them if a whole fruit would be better to serve than the cocktail. Or saying to a line cutter, "that's not cool, you know better."

In this way food-tenders manage the social life of the lunchroom, while keeping to the rules of the game, lest the school develop a bad reputation among not only the school district but the state and federal institutions.   The cashiers have a more harried life, keeping the line moving, watching for line-cutters, students shoving other students, or 'middle kids' taking a food container, opening it to see what is in it, then putting it back. The cashier enters conversations with students, to keep the line moving. Their job requires sustaining action, breaking through barriers, settling matters, so students have a good time, in short duration encounters, that sustain rhythm and tempo, and sometimes invite dramatic involvement in social life. The bulk of cashier is given over to keeping the rules of the varied institutions.

The social life of school lunchroom refracts the spectrum of the rules and policies of the institutional matrix. Food-tenders are more than police to prevent fights among students, rather they enact theatric definitions of the situations in order to enact social orders by patterned rhetorical routines (or raps) between themselves and available students who will play along in improvisation. It is a process of concentrating student energy, expanding it by widening involvement to an audience of students in line. "Get that unopened fruit over here." "Why are you drinking your milk and eating in line, why not sit at the table and eat. THere is still five minutes." Unsafe energy is channeled into 'safe energy' in a theatric pattern of worker-student conversational exchanges that can become contests or generate orderly social interaction (Bell, 1976: 106).

Conclusions

In sum, in quantum hermeneutics, there is a material modification of the food that is being restored in monstrous ways as healthy for children. A radical pragmatist and a radical quantum hermeneutic spiral is taking place. Open systems theory is just too dumb, too superficial, to monological, too naïve to cope with the hermeneutic spiral of food antesystemicity-systemicity-antisystemicity. This superstructure spirality of food processes is plastic modernity. The prolongations and effects of antesystemicity are being felt in the systemicities and antisystemicity counter movements. Naïve spiralization processes of food have become dangerously unhealthy to kids and planet, and this is partly because opens systems think in so abstract, vague, and absurd. Despite verifiable empirical food science, the lobby of the agribusiness and frankenfood science keeps convincing policy makers and school principles that processed food and bottled water is all quite healthy. Quantum and pragmatist hermeneutic have to consent with the *naif* realism (ibid, p. 122) of food antesystemicity-systemicity-antisystemicity representations that are accepted as common-sense in the middle schools. From a quantum hermeneutics method, there is not one space or one time, rather there are plural spaces and times, in the flux of energetics of food, so concocted, as the be monstrous plasticity. While organization behavior and organization theory stands still, regurgitating the open systems babel, the food plasticizes at an accelerating rate. The plastic and the genetically modified and fast food industries have some ethical answerability for this spirality, the hermeneutic torsions which plague the middle school food in our era of plasticity.

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