

AI Assisted Storytelling Self Creation and Moral Answerability

A Working Paper in Dialogue with Muhammad Asghari

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Figure 1. Two imagined AI sensemaking robots—a Bojean storyteller and an Asghari-an philosophical interlocutor—making sense of story, self-creation, and moral answerability.

Abstract

This paper is offered as an opening for dialogue with Professor Muhammad Asghari, not as an attempt to appropriate his philosophical work. It places his writings on Richard Rorty, moral philosophy, pragmatism, and self-creation beside my own work on organizational storytelling, antenarrative, quasi-objects, the Ghost Vortex, and moral answerability in the AI revolution. The central problem is simple but not simple-minded: when a large language model participates in telling an organizational story, who is creating whom? Rorty's emphasis on self-creation offers an important provocation, but AI-assisted storytelling also intensifies questions of responsibility, material conditions, persuasion, and the uncounted labor beneath smooth interfaces. I argue that usefulness cannot be allowed to become a substitute for truth, nor can a story's market success become a substitute for answerability. The paper proposes a modest dialogue between neopragmatism, Bakhtinian answerability, and antenarrative practice for scholars and practitioners of AI business storytelling.

Keywords: AI-assisted storytelling; moral answerability; neopragmatism; Richard Rorty; self-creation

A Related Working Paper

This dialogue is a companion to my working paper, “The Last Postmodernist Running the Circumference of Storytelling Mountains Without Seeing or Hearing His Own Inner Subtle Storytelling Mountain.” It returns to the office-supply ethnography, Tamara-Land, the culture industry, quasi-objects, material AI labor, and the neglected inner storytelling mountain. The paper may be read directly at [https://davidboje.com/ws/The_Last_Postmodernist_Storytelling_Mountains_Boje_Revised\(1\).pdf](https://davidboje.com/ws/The_Last_Postmodernist_Storytelling_Mountains_Boje_Revised(1).pdf). I cite it here not as a closed answer, but as the surrounding landscape from which this conversation with Professor Asghari begins (Boje, 2026).

An Invitation to a Philosophical Conversation

Professor Muhammad Asghari’s work gives our Writers Lab a timely philosophical doorway. His publications on Richard Rorty’s moral philosophy, on an ampler and more flexible pragmatism in conversation with Susan Haack, and on self-creation in philosophy of education do not arrive as decorations for a business-school discussion. They ask what kind of inquiry, judgment, and self-making are at stake when human beings make meaning together (Asghari, 2015; Asghari & Haack, 2020; Mohajel & Asghari, 2024).

I approach that doorway as a business-storytelling scholar who has spent too much time in the middle of organizations to believe that a story is merely a clean narrative delivered at the end of a PowerPoint. In the 1991 office-supply ethnography, stories were fragmented, contested, whispered, withheld, and changed in the telling. I later called the living multiplicity of such movement Tamara-Land. The AI revolution has not made this problem disappear. It has enlarged it, accelerated it, and hidden more of its material and moral conditions behind an agreeable interface (Boje, 1991, 1995).

This is therefore a working paper for conversation. It does not tell Professor Asghari what his philosophy means. It asks whether a dialogue among his Rorty-centered concerns, his interest in pragmatism, and my storytelling mountains can help us refuse two easy positions: that AI is only a useful tool, and that AI is an autonomous intelligence that has somehow escaped human responsibility.

The Question of Self Creation When AI Helps Tell the Story

Mohajel and Asghari (2024) return to Rorty’s notion of self-creation as a central concern for education. The idea is powerful for the AI era because every user of a large language model confronts a small but consequential scene of self-description. I write a prompt. The model returns a possible version of my thought. I alter it, accept it, reject it, or become impressed by it. Did I create that response? Did the response create a new possibility for me? Or did a corporation’s training archive, optimization regime, and safety policy create a sentence that is now willing to speak in my voice?

The answer cannot be a simple ownership claim. There is a co-creation relation, but it is not an equal one. A user brings biography, need, attention, habit, authority, and a body that can be hurt. The system brings

patterns learned from vast and uneven archives, computational infrastructures, hidden labor, and institutional priorities. The apparent conversation is therefore a quasi-object relation: AI circulates among people, data, organizations, infrastructures, and stories, making and remaking a collective as it moves (Serres, 2007; Latour, 1993).

Self-creation becomes thin when it is treated as the production of a smooth personal brand. It becomes thicker when a person can answer for the relations that make the story possible: the sources excluded, the workers rendered invisible, the people represented without consent, and the future consequences of saying yes to the machine's flattering first draft. This is where the phrase "AI-assisted self-creation" needs a warning label. Assistance is not innocence.

From Usefulness to Truthfulness and Answerability

Pragmatism gives us an indispensable question: what difference does this story make in practice? But this question is not permission to reduce truth to whatever works for the powerful. An AI sales narrative may work beautifully for a corporation while obscuring water use, electricity demand, labor displacement, data extraction, or the loss of a worker's voice. It may be useful to an executive and still be untrue in the sense that matters to those who must live with its consequences.

Here I add Bakhtin's moral answerability. No one has an alibi in being. A person cannot simply say that the algorithm, the dashboard, the consultant, or the approved prompt made the decision. The response is still mine, ours, and organizationally distributed. This does not deny technical causation; it refuses moral disappearance. In the language of my recent work, the Ghost Vortex names the active but uncounted traces of human labor, training data origins, environmental impacts, and institutional exclusions beneath an apparently seamless AI interface.

The practical test, then, is not whether an AI-generated business story is persuasive. It is whether it remains open to interruption by those it affects. Can workers correct it? Can communities contest it? Can the story disclose its material conditions? Can its author say where the model was used and what judgments were retained as human responsibilities? A more flexible pragmatism becomes stronger, not weaker, when it keeps these questions in view.

Antenarrative Rather Than Machine Closure

The temptation of contemporary AI is closure. Give the machine a messy meeting transcript and it will offer an executive summary, a strategy, a narrative arc, a list of action items, perhaps even a morale statement. This can be helpful. But organizational life is not a waiting room for a beginning-middle-end story. It is a field of antenarratives: bets, before-stories, fragments, counter-stories, and stories that remain in motion (Boje, 2001).

An antenarrative approach does not say that coherence is bad. It says coherence has a cost. When the AI turns fragments into a single clean story, whose hesitation has been removed? Whose contradiction has been tidied away? Which future has been declared impossible because the most probable continuation was made to look inevitable? The question is especially important in business storytelling, where an attractive narrative can rapidly become a script for layoffs, automation, acquisition, or compliance.

Professor Asghari's work on self-creation helps sharpen this issue. A person or community cannot create itself only by selecting from machine-produced options. Self-creation needs the capacity to redescribe, to refuse, to be surprised, and to hear an answer from another person who is not merely predicting the next likely word. AI can participate in that process, but it should not close it.

The Culture Industry Returns Through the Prompt Window

Horkheimer and Adorno's culture industry remains relevant because it directs attention to the industrial organization of desire, not simply to individual taste. In the AI era, the prompt window can become a new stage for standardized personalization: an answer feels intimate because it is tailored, yet its conditions of production remain remote. The danger is not that every AI response is false. The danger is that the convenience of the response makes it difficult to ask whose interests shaped the possible answers.

Rorty's attention to language, irony, and redescription is useful here, but the organizational setting adds a political economy. A chief executive's AI story is not the same as a student's AI story, nor the same as a community's story about a data center. Each comes with different resources, risks, audiences, and opportunities for correction. The machine does not erase those differences; it can amplify them while making the result look neutral.

That is why I do not want an anti-AI sermon. I want better questions. What does an AI story invite us to do? Who gains the right to define usefulness? What evidence is treated as noise? What has become invisible in the polished language? And how can a philosophical conversation keep the organizational story alive enough for human beings to remain answerable?

Rorty Pragmatism and My Own Storytelling Work

The conversation with Professor Asghari has made me look again at the pathways through my own work that touch Richard Rorty, pragmatism, postmodernism, and the ethics of organizational story. *Organizational Research: Storytelling in Action* (Boje, 2018) is particularly important because it treats research as storying in action rather than as a view from nowhere. It offers a place to ask whether AI-assisted inquiry makes a story more responsive, or merely more quickly standardized.

Restorying reengineering (Boje et al., 1997) challenged the supposedly neutral language of organizational redesign by reopening the stories erased in reengineering. *Lessons from Premodern and Modern for Postmodern Management* (Boje, 2017) refuses an era-by-era triumphalism: the postmodern does not simply

replace what came before. These works matter now because AI corporate storytelling often narrates itself as a clean historical break while remaining entangled with older hierarchies, extraction, and instrumental rationalities.

The pragmatist thread becomes explicit in the COPE framework, in pragmatic storytelling, and in my work with Iranian leaders' conflict framing (Boje & Saylor, 2015; Hacker et al., 2013; Pittz et al., 2017). The question is never merely whether a narrative is coherent. It is what a story does, whose possibilities it opens or closes, and whether it remains ethically answerable to those who must live its consequences. Reclaiming Story in Organization (Boje et al., 2001) and the later account of digital organization (Boje, 2019) make the same point: organization does not lose story when it becomes digital; it becomes a new terrain on which story, discourse, power, and human judgment are contested.

Turing Chalmers Hofstadter and the Question of Machine Mind

The historical figure I had in mind is Alan Turing. During World War II, Turing was a leading cryptanalyst at Bletchley Park and helped design the Bombe used against Enigma. In 1945 he moved to the National Physical Laboratory and worked on the ACE, a detailed early design for a stored-program computer. It would be historically careless to call the Bombe the first AI machine; it was a codebreaking electromechanical device. Yet the path from codebreaking, computation, and the question “Can machines think?” is one of the formative paths into the present AI revolution (GCHQ, n.d.).

David Chalmers, M. C. Escher, J. S. Bach, Kurt Gödel, and Douglas Hofstadter belong in this discussion because they keep machine intelligence from becoming only a business forecast. Chalmers asks about mind and consciousness; Escher stages recursion, strange loops, and impossible perspective; Bach makes counterpoint and variation audible; Gödel unsettles any fantasy that formal systems contain every truth about themselves; and Hofstadter places these motifs together in Gödel, Escher, Bach. I am not claiming that these thinkers settle whether an AI system is conscious. I am saying that their work keeps the philosophical conversation open where corporate storytelling wants a quick answer.

For the present paper, this is a storying resource. The prompt and response may look like a closed loop, but they are not. They are a strange loop folded through human language, organizational incentives, historical archives, energy, labor, and future consequences. That is one reason moral answerability cannot be delegated to the system.

Bubbles That Burst and the AI Revolution

I have found a strong candidate for the whole-book history of bubbles: Aman Verjee's A Brief History of Financial Bubbles. Its public materials trace market manias across history and explicitly place AI in the contemporary conversation. I will use it as a historically informed companion, not as proof that the AI revolution must burst. Whether the current AI buildout is a bubble, a durable general-purpose technology, or

a mixture of both remains an empirical and ethical question. The better formulation is that genuine technological change can still be narrated, financed, and governed in bubble-like ways (Verjee, 2026).

This caution belongs with our philosophical dialogue. A bubble story promises a dramatic ending; an antenarrative asks us to inspect the wagers before the ending is known. Thus I do not write “the AI bubble will burst” as prophecy. I ask what happens to workers, communities, learning, and human self-creation if institutional stories price the future as though uncertainty had already disappeared.

Toward a Dialogue Practice for the Writers Lab

A modest practice follows. First, when a group uses AI to draft a story, preserve the fragments before producing the synthesis. Let people read the transcript, the counter-story, and the machine’s version side by side. Second, name the human decision points: what the model proposed, what was accepted, what was rejected, and why. Third, ask the pragmatist question together with the answerability question: useful for whom, true in what respect, and answerable to whom?

Fourth, make room for self-creation without turning it into lonely individualism. A person’s self-description is always shaped by others; the ethical work is to make the relation more dialogical, not to pretend that one has created oneself alone. Fifth, investigate the Ghost Vortex: labor, data, water, electricity, infrastructures, and exclusions. A story about AI that ignores its material body is not an adequate story.

This is the possible meeting ground between Western contemporary philosophy and business storytelling in the AI revolution. It is neither a disciplinary takeover nor an invitation to easy agreement. It is a practice of disagreement that does not give up on relation.

Conclusion A Humble Reply to the Philosopher King

I began with a deliberately humble image: an organizational storyteller trying to discourse with a philosopher king. The point is not to flatter the philosopher or diminish the storyteller. It is to recognize that AI business storytelling needs philosophy precisely when it is tempted to become only technique, market language, or a machine’s apparent fluency.

The wager of this paper is that AI-assisted storytelling can support self-creation only if it also supports interruption, contestation, material awareness, and moral answerability. The AI revolution does not absolve us from making stories. It makes the way we make stories more consequential. That is why I welcome Professor Asghari to the Writers Lab: not to settle the argument, but to keep the argument philosophically alive.

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