

The Antenarrative Cultural Turn in Narrative Studies – revised Sept 16 2003

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### **Pre-story**

I would like to challenge and problematize the recognized theoretical perspective on narrative in order to pose an alternative. I am interested in something I call antenarratives, which has to do with the emergence of new discursive knowledge and power practices. Antenarratives are “in the middle,” and “in-between” (Boje, 2001: 293) refusing to attach the beginnings and endings needed to achieve narrative closure as required by narrative. Antenarrative is defined as “the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted, and pre-narrative speculation, a bet, a proper narrative can be constituted” (Boje, 2001: 1).

The contribution of antenarrative is what to do with all the non-linear, almost living storytelling that is fragmented, polyphonic and collectively produced, that does not fit traditional definitions of narrative theory. Looking at the relation of narrative and antenarrative shifts analytic focus to flows that are not fixed and networks that are emergent but also self-deconstructing, becoming interpenetrated and constantly unraveling and reconstructing storylines.

### **Narrative Theory**

Narrative theory is plural and wonderfully varying. Narratology is defined as “the theory and systematic study of narrative” (Currie, 1998: 1). For over two decades poststructuralists and some postmodernists and critical theorists have deployed deconstruction to declare the death of several dominant narratology paradigms, including realist, structuralist, and social constructionist. Narratives (as they are commonly considered by most scholars) complement modernist conceptualizations of discourse, discounting or altogether overlooking the fragmented and unformed stories that accomplish intriguingly different communicative purposes. For example, in formalist (plus pragmatist & realist) narratology, narrative is a sign system separated from

knowledge of the signified; it is rhetorical device' and a contextualist epistemology of historical event unfolding into the present (Boje, 2001: 15).

There is dissension among narratology perspectives. For example, social construction (after Berger & Luckmann, 1966) is alleged to exclude political economy, ecology, and ideology in its application to organization studies; something which poststructuralists and some critical theorists and postmodernist can not abide. Structuralist narratology, such as the traditions of Russian Formalists (Propp & Shklovsky), American structuralism (James, Lubbock, Booth & Chatman) and French Structuralists (Barthes, Todorov, Bremond, Grimas, Pavel & Prince) – according to Culler (1981: 169) dualize narrative as over story. Narrative is elite to story, and is compelled to add plot and coherence to tidy up fragmented and non-linear storylines. Antenarrative, as we will explore below, is a way to move beyond the duality of narrative and story. Narrative theory (structuralism, semiotics, formalism) without antenarrative is a status degradation of story by elite academics, dismissing story as folklore, not true narratology.

Narrative analysts seem to replace folk stories with less messy narrative emplotment to create an account, in organizations, that is fictively rational, free of tangled contingency and emergence. Czarniawska (1997: 78), for example, says narrative, or “a *story* consists of a plot comprising causally related episodes that culminate in a solution to a problem.” Elsewhere, Czarniawska (1999: 2) clarifies, “for them to become a narrative, they require a *plot*, that is, some way to bring them into a meaningful whole.” A similar definition can be found in Gabriel (2000: 22), who focuses storytelling to narrative, “in the narrow sense of narratives with simple but resonant plots and characters, involving narrative skill, entailing risk, and aiming to entertain, persuade, and win over.” Similarly, Weick (1995: 128) focuses on stories that “gather strands of experience into a plot” or a “good narrative” that provides a “plausible frame for sensemaking,” a way of mapping formal coherence on “what is otherwise a flowing soup.” Narratives then provide (say narrative theorists) a grander plot, a more emotional charge, a modernist tidying up of stories, whose plots are too rudimentary, missing, or unaesthetic.

Czarniawska (1997: 78) collected field notes, documents, and self reports from her interlocutors. She categorized these into Van Maanen's (1988) *Tales of the Field*,

using a typology of stories, serials, and themes. We are interested in the stories, the tidy plot of causally related episodes culminating in problem solution, which are dualized by Czarniawska from serials and themes, which do not have plots. Stories, she views, as the basic building block (or unit) of any narrative.

In organizations the prescription for a good story is very simple indeed: mix well some random events, several attempts at control, and the corresponding amount of countercontrol, put in a warm place, and wait for results (1997: 79).

Readers, new to communication studies, may benefit from a short example to illustrate narrative theory limitations, the inherent assumption of a fully plotted storyline, told anew as tidy narrative, that support power structures; those readers steeped in narrative perspective will no doubt already know many examples. Czarniawska (1997: 79-82), for example tells the story (actually a set of fragments, many stories) of “*A New Budget and Accounting Routine in Big City*,” to show how reductionist narratives “are created and negotiated” (p. 92) out of accounts of local events and intentions. Now what are these story bits that are subsumed under the tidy narrative of bureaucratic paradox?

There are two quoted anonymous story fragments embedded in Czarniawska’s (1997: 80-81) “*A New Budget and Accounting Routine in Big City*.”

You must understand that municipal accounting today is little else than a game with numbers. Our ambition was to change this state of affairs, to make an annual report actually say something. We wanted to relate it to actual operations and to tell the story of what we wanted to achieve, what has actually been done, and what the prospects are for the future...

It is very difficult to abandon old habits—for all those people who deal daily with such questions in a practical context. They may even agree with you in principle, but when it comes to practice, all they see are the problems. They refuse to see the opportunities for us in the change proposed. It’s too threatening to their bookkeepers’ souls. Some of them have built up all their professional lives around those bits and pieces that must eventually fit elegantly into their places in the final accounts. A proposal that aims at shaking the pieces out of place also means that they will have to lose some of their power and status

In this story quoting, that she turned into narrative, a *paradox* is neatly incorporated into the design of a new accounting procedure, a change that would improve the status quo (p.

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**Comment:** Transition here is difficult to follow. Perhaps explicitly setting up Czarniawska as an example would be sufficient for helping the reader along at this point. However, the shift to “we” in the very next sentence is also somewhat difficult to follow.

99). More formally stated, she poses the “the bureaucratic paradox” as “bureaucracy as a means contradicts its own goal, in the sense that the less humane it becomes, the better (that is, the more smoothly) it functions in the service of humanity” (p. 94).

In other words, the function of the storytelling fragments reinscribed into a simpler narrative emplotment of change and resistance to change is a way the Swedish bureaucracy blunts an innovation that interrupts routinized action, by translating it into a version much less threatening to the dominant institutional thought structure (p. 98-99). The translation and interpretation of local polyphonic stories of events -- into one reductionist narrative of paradox is, as Czarniawska (1997: 96) keenly observes, an act of co-optation. I would like to resituate narrative’s tidy project, by looking more closely at the narrative theorist’s moves.

As Burke (1945/1952: xiii), argues, when “a writer” in this case Czarniawska, “seems to get great exaltation out of proving, with an air of much relentlessness, that some philosophic term or other has been used to cover a variety of meanings,” in this case, the term is *paradox*, and “if you look closer you will find that it happens to be associated with some cultural or political trend from which the writer would dissociate” herself. Czarniawska’s disassociative move is to invoke *paradox*, so as to purge storytelling of its localness, and polyphonic mess, making narrative the dominant anecdote to ambiguity in complex organizations. Burke’s move is to invoke the pentad elements of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose (a reinvention of Aristotle’s six poetic elements, collapsing rhythm and dialog into agency). However, if, despite this functionalist theory, we can follow Burke (xiii, italics in original) to an important point-- our task is not to label and dismiss ambiguity, it is to “clarify the *resources* of ambiguity.” Using the strategy of the synecdoche (making a part stand for the whole), making the simple narrative stand for the whole complex of storytelling dynamics, misses the resources of ambiguity in enactment (Burke, 1945/1952: 328). That is, narrative and story are in dialectic relationship, and the transformation is linguistic, as well as dramatic (p. 402).

In her own pragmatist theorizing, narrative-paradox is substituted for multi-voiced storytelling, to account for the ambiguity of linguistic transformation, as well as resistance. “Paradoxes” says Czarniawska (1997: 97) “until recently the villains of

organizational drama, constitute its dynamics and, even more important, account for its transformation.” The story fragments are put into this paradox by Czarniawska (1997: 99), in which actors incorporated the narrative “into the design, the most likely outcome of which was a change that would improve the status quo.” Czarniawska, following Burkean pentadic ratios (e.g., Burke, p 402), imputes motives to the agents. Alternatively stated (Czarniawska, 1997: 99):

... An innovation is blunted, and maybe even finally repelled, by various representatives of the institutionalized thought structure. The accountants know how the accounting should be done; SALA knows how the relationship between itself and its members would work’ and the politicians know what an annual report addressed to them should look like. What they are trying to do can be seen as co-optation of ideas: in this way, they can eventually impose their own rationale, or rather the rationale of the organization they represent, on the innovators.

The narrator tells us that politicians did not want transparency in their accounting systems, preferring to keep the process mysterious (p. 81). In the chain of narrated events, just before the transparent and mysterious were to be laid side by side, the municipal councilor called for a vote by the Finance Council to abolish the innovation. The vote failed, but the opposition to the change managed to table the accounting innovation.

Narrative theory, as this example illustrates, has something important to say about the discursive narration of complex events. Regulated discourse, for example Foucault (1978, 1980), is a system of representation with rules and practices to produce meaningful statements about a topic. In this example, the new accounting practices would produce meaningful, even transparent statements, but that is not what the dominant coalition wanted. These rules and practices are historically situated, as Czarniawska’s research illustrates. Narrative is part of regulated discourse, and constructs topic statements at historical moments. Narratives construct rules of inclusion and exclusion about discursive topics. Yet, to me, this must be a process that is more than just the elegant narratives with their tidy plots and cohesion, allowing us to abandon storytelling dynamics to concepts such as paradox. Knowledge also acquires topical[word(s) missing?] and authority within organizations by embodying and conveying various untidy truth claims (or emergent regimes of truth)--be they those of writers or those of the *in situ* characters. I agree that narrative is part of the picture of the hastening of the decline of

old discourse rules and practices, and aids the emergence of new discourse by narrating ruptures and radical breaks as acts of paradox or other dramatic emplotment. Yet, there is something more, something being swept away by narrative closure.

Narratives are a part of the discursive formations that sustain, disrupt, or compose regimes of truth by supplanting story dynamics with reduction. Narratives circulate in multi-centered networks of institutional power, but so too, do lesser formed storytellings that narratives displace. Narratives are in relation to specific knowledge and power practices, and are therefore conveyors of discursive regulation, but so are weaker constructions of story bits. Narratives are self-deconstructing, vulnerable to every new storyline that unweaves and reweaves the hierarchy. And, to me, this is the reconstructive gap that an antenarrative theory can explore.

### **Antenarrative Theory**

Antenarrative has a double meaning, the ante that is before and also a bet. Used as an adverb, "ante" combined with narrative means earlier than narrative. An antenarrative is a gambler's bet that a before-story (pre-story) can take flight and disrupt and transform narrative practice. Antenarrative derives its organizing force in emergent storytelling where plots are not possible, or at least contested, and speculative, rich in polyphony and polysemy. Stories are antenarrative when told without the proper plot sequence and mediated coherence preferred by narrative theorists. Antenarratives lack the cohesive accomplishment of narratives, and do not as yet possess their closure of beginning, middle, and ending. Antenarrative is a non-linear, fragmented, emergent account of incidents or events, but narrative comes after and adds, more "plot" and tighter "coherence" to the storyline. Antenarratives, in contrast, are abundant, interactive, emergent, and cease to be when they become narrative forms.

My antenarrative focus includes Derrida's (199?) idea of self-deconstruction, a process that occurs as the dynamic weave of differences unravels narrative, with or without the help of the analyst. It also extends to Latour (1996: 118) who argues there is a difference between the linear narrative *diffusion* model (narratives that erupt fully formed in the mind of Zeus) and the non-linear *whirlwind* model of what I call

antenarrative, with more rhizomatic ensembles that want to change the world. In short, antenarrative is the obverse of the diffusion model of narrative.

Antenarratives are self-deconstructing, fragmenting, emergent, and networking among polyphonic characters, not at all static or linear. Antenarratives have five dimensions (Boje, 2001: 3-5).

1. Antenarrating is both before whatever narratology as a method and theory supplements, frames and imposes order onto story.
2. Antenarrative gives attention to the speculative, the ambiguity of sensemaking and guessing as to what is happening in the flow of experience.
3. Antenarrative directs our analytic attention to the flow of storytelling, as a sensemaking to lived experience before the narrative requirements of beginnings, middles or endings.
4. Antenarrative is about the *Tamara* of storytelling (Boje, 1995). *Tamara* is a play where ten characters unfold their stories before a walking, sometimes running, audience that fragments into small groups to chase characters and storylines from room to room.
5. Antenarrative is a collective memory before it becomes reified into the organizational story, or consensual and official narrative.

The crisis of narrative theory in modernity is what to do with the non-linear antenarrating, with its fragmented, polyphonic emergence in the *Tamara* of collective story production embedded in the everyday situation of fragmentation and simultaneous action. Telling stories that lacks coherence and plot is contrary to modernity. Yet, people are always working and living in the middle of collectively mediate antenarrative processes, where few accounts attain narrative closure and fixity. Death, disease, and disaster are chaotic experiences that are hard to narrate, too shattering to put into closure.

Antenarrative is a bet that a pre-story can be told and theatrically performed that will enroll stakeholders in “intertextual” ways that transform the world of action into theatrics; at the same time the antenarratives never quite get there; they unravel as fast as coherence is applied. Antenarrative dynamics include the plurivocal (many voiced), polysemous (rich in multiple interpretations), and dispersed pre-narrations that interpenetrate wider social contexts. Antenarrative is intertextual, a dialogic conversation among many tellers, listeners, and texts. There is antenarrative intertextuality within narratives and between narratives, and between antenarratives. It is a carnivalesque

crowd of authors, readers, performers, directors, editors and spectators all engaged in textual (re) production, (re) distribution, and (re) consumption.

In Foucauldian terms, antenarrative is the process of an emerging regime of knowledge, an operation of power. Narrative studies are just beginning to take a cultural turn towards antenarrative.

Over the past decade, there is increased attention to the emergent qualities of antenarratives, the little stories not quite cohesive and formed enough to merit the term “narrative.” There have been few, and so far unpublished studies of antenarratives. Vickers (2002: 2-3), for example, looks at how “postmodern antenarratives encourage the possibility that there may be no story to tell, only fragments that may never come together coherently. She combines Heideggerian phenomenology with an antenarrative exploration of multi-voiced ways of telling stories, of putting fragments together. Using in-depth interviews of people whose lives were shattered by chronic illness and suffering, Vickers presents what does not fit into coherence narratives. A second study by Barge (2002), takes an antenarrative approach to organizational communication and managerial practice by focusing attention on ways people manage the multi-voiced nonlinear character of organizational life. Antenarrative, for example, says Barge (2002: 7) “requires managers to recognize the multiplicity of stories living and being told in organizations.” He gives examples of the managerial practice in the Kensington Consultation Centre in London. In this chapter, after a bit more theorizing, I would like to illustrate antenarrative in my continuing study of Enron (Boje, 2002; Boje & Rosile, 2002, 2003). Boje and Rosile (2003: 87), for example, say that “antenarratives are highly interactive, constituting, and constructing evolving and shifting patterns of prestory connections that reterritorialize an emergent labyrinth that can veer out of collective authorial control.” The approach we took was to look at the dialectic between epic and tragic stories of Enron.

### **Towards a Dialectic Theory of Narrative and Antenarrative**

In this chapter, I want to explore more widely how in practice narrative is dialectic to antenarrative. I will assert, in this chapter, that narrative and antenarrative are dialectically related in organizationally-situated, regulated discourse. Narrative combined

with antenarrative can broaden inquiry to examine multi-voiced and emergent ways of constituting discursive regulation.

There are several important dialectic dimensions. First, the dialectic between antenarrating and narrating, between emergence and coherence. Second, the dialectic between divergence into epic antenarrating and the convergence into more tragic (or dramatic) narrative closure. Third antenarratives that a multi-stranded multi-author tellings and the pressure in organizations for collective consensus around official single-author narratives.

Each narrative erases a prior way of telling the story. It is also antenarrative, in how one way of telling can erase a prior way of narrating. There is a pull of narrative to unravel into many stranded ways of telling and many voices of remembering. Grand narratives are not banished, as Lyotard (1984) would have it, but in practices are opposed and resisted by antenarrating voices. Antenarrative theory problematizes Lyotard's approach to grand narrative, by showing how dominant narratives are opposed and shattered by a web of antenarratives. Local antenarrated knowledge struggles with great leader or official organization narratives of heroic exploits. The storytelling system of organizations is the dialectic of narrating and antenarrating. Antenarrating is the ground that keeps moving, cracking the portrayal of the publicly narrated face of the institution. Both are part of the plurality, the intertextual dialogue between power and periphery, and between tellings of past, present, and future. I think narrative attempts to camouflage antenarrative fabric, and present a tidier public account, one that is minus its polysemy (contested meanings). Yet, situated acts of antenarrating are constantly cracking that façade. There is a dialectic interplay of grand narration and local antenarration.

Ricoeur's (1984) emplotment hermeneutics provides a link between antenarrating and narrating. The antenarrative in the hermeneutic spiral is the first memesis, the pre-story and the pre-understanding needed grasp the emergence of plot. The second memesis is the plot, which requires the pre-understanding to make it intelligible. And the third mimesis is knowledge needed to follow and understand the plot that gets told. Antenarrating is also what connects Ricoeur's three mimetic moments, the liminal moves and flows betwixt and between. Ricoeur argues that readers cannot follow a narrative plot (2<sup>nd</sup> memesis) through what I am calling its *antenarrative* twists, turns, contingencies,

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coincidences and dead ends to a forgone conclusion without a great deal of pre-understanding (1<sup>st</sup> memesis) and followability (3<sup>rd</sup> memesis). Antenarrating and narrating is therefore a dialectic and hermeneutic of time, coherence, and emergence.

In sum, antenarrating in its dialectic relation to narrating lets us focus on how emergence and fragmentation are continually breaking free of closure.

### **Enron Narrating and Antenarrating**

I would like to illustrate this argument using antenarratives from Enron Corporation. Antenarratives have a trajectory in Enron spectacles; in the Deleuzian sense, antenarratives take flight in and through a series of spectacles, yet also crack open and transform the faciality of Enron. The faciality of Enron (i.e. public image) comes through in its press releases, slogans, speeches, reports and web pages. Antenarratives feed on new contexts, they consume contexts, they recontextualize. In Enron's case, antenarratives include not only the blatant theatrical icons of Star Wars, but also plots such as spectacle-turned-into-scandal. Enrollment in galumphing Enron antenarratives took over a decade; a casting call signed up characters to play roles in eight intertextual antenarrative clusters we will analyze, but it was unraveling from the very beginning in ways antenarrative theory makes clear.

Here is a brief chronicle of events related to Enron, to help readers recall the unfolding news events in the public narrative. This will set the stage before showing the more rhizomatic network of antenarratives playing into and against this chronology. I will focus on the dramatic plots, that Enron executives gave out to the public. Each plot is a shift in corporate strategy. There is a multiplicity of strategic plots narrated to summarize each historical phase.

#### **Table 1: Enron Chronology 1985 - 2002**

- 1985 – Enron sets out to become the premier natural gas pipeline in North America (Enron is the hero of deregulation in every Presidential administration's New Economy).
- 1990 – Enron changes its plot to become the world's first natural gas major (Enron is the hero of deregulated Free Economy market ideological frames).
- 1995 – Enron changes plot to become the world's leading energy company (Enron becomes the hero of Virtual Corporations, an ideological

frame that is about downsizing employees while providing maximum perks to full-time executives and their staff).

- 2001 – Another plot change, to become the world’s leading company (Enron is the superhero of the Bonfire of the Vanities, a world conqueror of American hypercompetitive global capitalism).
- 2002- Jan – A new plot, to emerge from bankruptcy as a viable, albeit smaller company (Enron, after bankruptcy is re-plotted as the villain, responsible for the *domino effect* of collapse of Arthur Andersen, and the string of expose megaspectacle scandals, such as WorldCom).
- 2002 – Aug – for Enron executives, the plot becomes to keep from serving time in Jail

In Table 2 “Enron Whodunit?” we (Boje & Rosile, 2002) outline ten plots that different commentators use to make sense of Enron.

<b>Table 2: ENRON Whodunit Plots</b>	
Plot 1. It was Andrew Fastow and his lieutenants.	Plot 6. It all relates to Afghanistan, and pipelines of ExxonMobil, Texaco, Unocal, BP Amoco, & Enron.
Plot 2. It was Fastow's bosses: Skilling and Lay.	Plot 7. Its a remake of the Seven Sisters from 1911.
Plot 3. It was the Domino Effect, ripple effects of Enron caused other corporations & executives to be exposed.	Plot 8. It was a failure of the system of Western Capitalism, its checks and balances.
Plot 4. It is the Whitehouse; this is Enrongate	Plot 9. It was the Business College; they taught the gentleman crooks everything they needed to de-fraud.
Plot 5. It was all three Presidents (Bush Sr., Clinton, & Bush Jr.)	Plot 10. It was the greed and hubris of everyone.

The ten plots in Table 2 represent the dialectic of tragic and epic looks at Enron. Plots 1 and 2, for example focus the tragic on a few players, thereby protecting layers of the political and economic system from more epic plots, such as 3 through 9. Plot 10 says everyone is to blame, which is to say, no one is, since everyone does it.

Antenarrative theory (Boje, 2001a) is closely tied to Kristeva (1980a: 36) and Bakhtin (1981), who suggest that each text has an intertextual “trajectory” that is historical and social (Boje, 2002, O’Connor, 2002). And it relates to Fairclough’s (1992) critical discourse analysis, i.e. his advancing the idea that the intertextual trajectory is embedded in hegemonic struggle. *Antenarrative* shifts the focus of narrative analysis from “what’s the story here” to questions of “why and how did this particular story emerge to dominate the stage?” Next, I would like to develop a theory of antenarrative trajectory.

**Antenarrative Trajectories** - Antenarrative rhizomatic flight continues as long as there is context left to transform (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Antenarrative is about ontological ways of being in the world; it is not sensemaking (Weick, 2000), it is world making; antenarratives feed on new contexts, they consume contexts, they recontextualize. Through antenarrating, bits and pieces of real events were inserted in the Enron executive’s dialogs, along with Star Wars and Jurassic metaphors, and blanket assurances of increasing profitability. The antenarratives flirted between fiction and reality in ways that seduced spectators and stakeholders into willingly suspending disbelief. The antenarrative trajectories can be thought of as strands that take rhizomatic paths.

**Rhizomes and Antenarrative** - A rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 6- 7) is defined as a network of subterranean trajectories (with root stem strands, radices, bulbs and tubers). The alleged fraud at Enron, its 3,500 off-the-balance-sheet partnership is an example of rhizomatic network. The raptor partnerships burrowed beneath the surface images of Enron from 1991 (with Cactus) on through 1997 (with Chewco, LJM1, LJM2) and deeper still with the secretive Southampton Place and RADR partnerships. The partnership strands fused and separated, stopped and re-started, encountering and absorbing blocks in rhizomatic fashion. The rhizome of fraud assumed many diverse

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partnership forms, while sustaining surface faciality (public image) of responsible risk management.

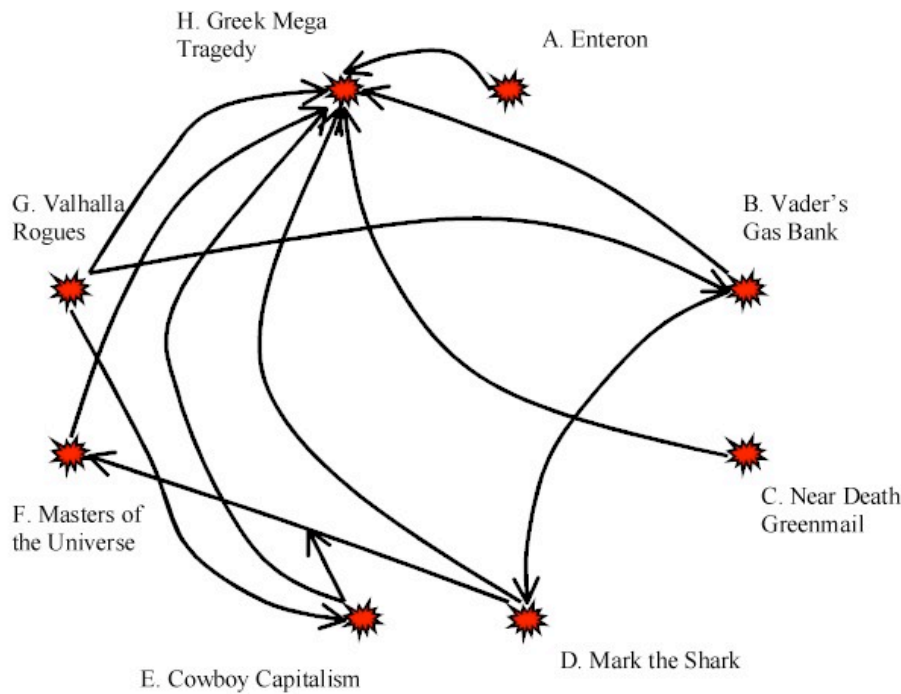


Figure 1 – Examples of Intertext of Antenarrative Trajectories

KEY to Figure 1:	
<b>A:H</b> Renaming game recommences after collapse of Enron.	<b>E:(D:F)</b> Cowboy Capitalism combines with Mark the Shark globe hopping strategy <b>E:H</b> Houston galas play & morph into White House scandals
<b>B:H</b> Offshore accounts, fake records, and Arthur Andersen of B repeat in H. <b>B:D</b> Skilling's 10 year war to oust Rebecca Mark ('the Shark')	<b>F:H</b> Bonfire of the Vanities interpenetrates with White House, Congress, & UK elite appointments to Enron boards and committees
<b>C:H</b> As in C, shareholders in H seek control and liquidation of Enron	<b>G:B</b> Valhalla Rogues resurfaces in Gas Bank <b>G:E</b> Valhalla Rogues merges with Cowboy Capitalism <b>G:H</b> Off-balance-sheet accounts and offshore banking & Arthur Andersen repeat from G to H
<b>D:H</b> Oppressive tales of villagers in India do not play on center stage until collapse	<b>H</b> Each of the antenarrative clusters reemerges in post-collapse inquiries

**D:F** Mark's global capitalism plays into Masters of the Universe

Figure 1 provides a graphic depiction of the intertextuality among the antenarrative clusters. The idea is the antenarratives of one cluster migrate and interpenetrate with those of other clusters. The Key at the bottom of Figure 1 gives examples of antenarratives that move in-between the clusters listed in Table 1. Figure 1 suggests many of the pieces of "H" (Greek Mega Tragedy) of the Enron collapse were present in antenarrative clusters, such as "G" (Valhalla Rogues), the oil traders of 1985-1987 who brought about an SEC investigation, Andersen Audits, off-shore accounts, creative accounting processes, and scandal. To take another example, pre and post to the "A" (Enteron) cluster, George Bush Jr.'s spectrum 7 oil company had Enteron partnerships (1985 & 1986); in other words George Bush did not just begin Enron-relations with corporate and executive contributions to his gubernatorial or presidential campaigns. I would like to expand on one example of antenarrative trajectory, "Gas Bank." Keep in mind each of the antenarrative clusters in Figure 1 is part of rhizomatic relations between the trajectories.

**Gas Bank, Example of Antenarrative Trajectory** - For example, Enron's "Gas Bank" antenarrative has gas producers who are depositors like in a commercial bank and the gas customers are like the borrowers, and Enron is like the bank that pools together deposits for the gas buyers (known as buyers). The Gas Bank project lasted from 1989 to 2001, and is more than a collaboration of many public and private institutions, Wall Street analysts, Harvard and Stanford MBAs recruited to be traders, and politicians from countries around the world.

There is disputed ownership of the Gas Bank idea; the idea morphs into the trading floor concept. One antenarrative is that Jeffrey Skilling came up with the "Gas Bank" strategy in 1989, while still working as a senior partner for McKinsey and Company in Houston (Kaminski & Martin, 2001: 43-44; Steffy & Levy, 2002: 32).

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**Comment:** A working definition of antenarrative clusters would be extremely helpful here, allowing the reader to more rapidly make sense of the specific examples and their relationship to the theory being advanced.

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**Comment:** What more is it? This point appears to be left hanging in the manuscript. Perhaps it will be resolved with a stronger transition to the next paragraph?

Gerald Bennett, however, has a different pre-story; Bennett was in charge of Enron's intrastate pipelines in 1989, and says it was his idea; Skilling grabbed idea and credit (Barnes, Barnett, & Schmitt, 2002). When Skilling presented his "Gas Bank" antenarrative to the assembled Enron Board and executives, the idea was soundly rejected. However, in yet another version, Kenneth Lay decided to ignore their advice, and give Skilling a chance to make it work. Others say it was Richard Kinder, Enron's president, (and not Kenneth Lay), who asked Skilling to join the company to run the new Gas Bank adventure. Most storytellers agree that on June 29, 1990, Skilling left McKinsey to join Enron (Boje, 2002). Skilling described Enron's Gas Bank strategy as, "get in early, push to open markets, position ourselves to compete, and compete hard when the opening comes."

With the Gas Bank, players seek to transform the bureaucratic ideology of the merger to a more post-bureaucratic market forces entity, a virtuality of lite-assets. But, whomever the author, the dialog and emplotment (Ricoeur, 1984) went like this: Enron would be intermediary between buys and sellers of natural gas, exploiting the spread between the buying and selling price. In this "Gas Bank" antenarrative, "gas producers" were "depositors" in the "commercial bank" and the "consumers" were the "borrowers"; "Enron" was the "bank" that "pooled the deposits" (i.e. the supply commitments) to fund long-term (15 year or more) commitment to gas buyers (the borrowers). What happened with the Gas Bank idea is also unsettled. In one version, when Skilling presented his "Gas Bank" antenarrative to the assembled Enron Board and executives, the idea was soundly rejected. However, in yet another version, Kenneth Lay himself decided to ignore their advice, and give Skilling a chance to make it work. Others say it was Richard Kinder, Enron's president, (and not Kenneth lay) who asked Skilling to join the company to run the new Gas Bank adventure (Barnes, Barnett, & Schmitt, 2002). Most storytellers agree that on June 29, 1990 Skilling left McKinsey to join Enron. Skilling described Enron's Gas Bank strategy as, "get in early, push to open markets, position ourselves to compete, and compete hard when the opening comes" (Kaminski & Martin, 2001).

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**Comment:** This essentially, though not exactly, repeats the previous paragraph.

In 1989, Skilling (or Bennett) also came up with a "Gas Swap" strategy, to remedy failed negotiations between Enron and a Louisiana aluminum company; Enron

could not physically transport gas from its own facilities and make the Louisiana deal profitable (Kaminski & Martin, 2001). That Gas Swap strategy “called for the customer to buy gas locally, paying a floating price, and simultaneously purchase a swap from Enron in which Enron would pay the producer's floating rates and the producer would pay Enron a fixed rate” (Kaminski & Martin, 2001: 44). The Gas Swap was a metascript-fix to the Gas Bank antenarrative; as in a commercial bank model, the Gas Swap would be equivalent to a “deposit guarantee system.” There were glitches to the plot. The initial Gas Bank plan did not persuade gas producers to sell Enron their reserves. Enron decided to offer money upfront to entice gas producers to deliver gas, later on, at the pre-agreed price. The problem was where to get the money?

Enter Andrew Fastow, a finance whiz kid from Continental Bank in Chicago, who moves to Houston (which made his wife much happier, since Houston is the home of her prominent family). In 1991, Fastow comes up with a way to get the money, a ‘partnership strategy’ called “Cactus.” Cactus partnerships took in money from banks and lent it to “energy producers in return for a portion of their existing gas reserves” (Barnes, Barnett, & Schmitt, 2002). Like the Gas Bank antenarrative, the Cactus re-scripting has disputed beginnings. Fastow would become instrumental in the hundreds of off-the-balance-sheet partnerships that would become the Achilles heel of Enron by 2001 (See Figure 1). Fastow had a reputation as a mean-spirited manager; he was Vader’s lieutenant, and would bear down on subordinates; the other side of Fastow’s character was known among the Houston social circle set, a benefactor to the arts (along with his wife). An important antenarrative is forming at this phase of the concentrated spectacle formation; financial wizards can keep the Gas Bank alive, and stop the kind of rogue trading that the Valhalla high-stakes gamblers pioneered in 1985 (see antenarrative cluster G below).

“If you ask an outsider what industry Enron is in they will say energy. If you ask an insider they will tell you that we are in the risk management business. We provide certainty of delivery and certainty of price,” Andrew Fastow, CFO, Enron Corp (cited in Kaminski & Martin, 2001: 44).

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**Comment:** This note and one like it on the next page seem to be editing problems.

Skilling and Fastow implemented a ‘Market Forward Price Curve’ method, based upon Enron’s unique knowledge of price information (from gas depositors and customers). Each day, every commodity-trading desk posts a single forward price curve, calculated directly from gas market prices (and used to predict the future price of gas or some other commodity).ii[xxii]

There were four significant changes to Enron by 1991 when Skilling and Fastow developed Gas Bank into the pre-cursor to the Energy Bank and Trading Floors. First, the bureaucratic organizational structure inherited from the Enteron (HNG/InterNorth) merger had to be reengineered; it was reduced from 15 layers of management to 4, thereby moving decision authority closer to people who possessed the knowledge. Second, Skilling changed the HRM performance review policy to implement his infamous rank and yank system (the goal was to remove the 20% lowest performers each year). Third, management and trading talent were recruited, primarily from Harvard and Stanford businessschools’ top graduates (luring graduates with \$20,000 signing bonuses, \$80 K salaries, and annual bonuses of up to 100 percent). Fourth, the risk management strategy for gas trades was changed from “experience, intuition, and estimates of potential losses” to a one-unit-sensitivity-risk analysis (for example, one basis point movement in interest rates, or one dollar move in the price of crude oil), and finally to a more sophisticated value-at-risk (VaR) approach at the portfolio level (Kaminski & Martin, 2001).iii[xxiii] This philosophy was combined with recruiting only those B-school grads who were high risk-takers. As we shall see, (Antenarrative Clusters E, F, and H), declining energy market fortunes by 2000, coupled with the rank-and-yank performance system, and adding the CIA/FBI spying email monitoring by the late 1990s, together with Skilling’s Machiavellian strategies and Fastow’s aggressive personality installs a macho risk-taking Enron corporate culture. And despite the ratings by *Fortune*, this “best place to work in America,” is back-stage, the most oppressive places to work in America.

**Gas Bank Morphs** - Enron’s Gas Bank morphed in deals such as ‘Jedi LP.’ JEDI is Enron-speak for “Joint Energy Development Investments.” Jedi began in 1993 as a partnership of Enron and the California Public Employees Retirement System (Calpers),

to invest in natural gas projects and assets; CalPERS invested \$250 million in a partnership. In 1997, Enron bought back its stake in JEDI from CalPERS for \$383 million and immediately sold it to another limited partnership called Chewco, named after the Chewbacca character in "Star Wars." Chewco was run by a former Enron executive. Then came other partnerships called LJM1 and LJM2 (both run by Mr. Fastow). On October 24 Fastow (\$30 million richer) was replaced as CFO and put on leave. On November 8 2001, Enron decided Chewco, LJM1, & LJM2 should have been consolidated on their books since 1997, thereby reducing prior reported net income by \$586 million. The Securities and Exchange Commission began to investigate. Enron wrote down shareholder equity by \$1.2 billion when it closed out its relationships with the LJM partnerships. There is also Kenobe Inc and Obi-1 Holdings. Off-the-balance sheet partnerships helped to hide losses of \$ 2 billion each in the water and telecommunications businesses, another \$ 2 billion lost in a Brazilian utility investment, and an additional \$ 1 billion lost on an electricity-generating plant in India.

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**Comment:** It seems the all-caps JEDI should be used for consistency here?

To summarize, we are tracing the antenarrative versions, the competing pre-stories, and the contested, unresolved histories, to see what patterns appear. There are emerging concentrated (Enteron and Gas Bank) spectacles, which have yet to marry with more diffuse spectacles (in the next section), and then into more integrated spectacles. There are also early, tamer versions of megaspectacle scandals (Fastow's Cactus and Skilling's Gas Bank try to resist being #G "Valhalla rogue oil traders" but, as we shall see, the off-shore accounts and accounting practices of the rogues returns again and again to haunt Enron). Finally, in these antenarratives, there is stagecraft, showmanship, front and back stage plots and counter-plots, and the assembling of the cast of characters for a set of scripts which is still opposed by the builders of pipelines and utility buildings.

Work by Bougen and Young (2000) in rhizomatic studies of auditing and bank fraud is directly relevant to the alleged Enron raptor rhizomatic networks. Enron's partnerships are assemblages, becomings that pass between Enron and others. The raptor assemblages were "heterogeneous collections of people becoming connected in different ways and at different times to" fraud (Bougen & Young, 2000: 2). In the bank and Enron frauds is a familiar refrain, "how could this have happened?" There were so many

regulators, auditors, government agencies, and administrators who are supposed to protect investors and employees from fraud. Yet the rhizomatic lines of partnerships kept on the move, intersecting with one another (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 203). The strands would connect and disconnect, form and dissolve, then reassemble. It is the movement that makes fraud so hard to trace; it just will not stand still. The partnership characters keep changing, the pattern will not remain stable. The intersecting strands that get blocked by inquiry, find ways to move around the rules and the gaze. From 1890 to 1892 41 national banks failed. Twenty six failures were the result of fraud. Like Enron, we know something happened. We know the players involved. And we can trace the money movements, but it could not be traced by the average Enron investor nor by the average employee.

The congressional hearings, the Powers (2002) report, the Houston federal case, they all want to freeze the antenarrative assemblage, and get a look at the fraud. But fraud passes undetected at the time when it goes down. Earlier in the Valhalla period of Enron (1985 - 1987), a banker in New York discovered an Enron fraud. Fraud was part of Enron since its beginning in 1985. It kept moving, circulating, assembling. The cast of characters changed, but the character "fraud" kept playing at the Wheel of Fortune. And fraud made money for lots of players. So many did not want to really detect fraud. They did not want to closely follow the rhizomatic lines, the strands were there, who who was complaining.

Enron treasurers, risk managers, comptrollers, audit committees, auditors, investors, banks were part of the Enron fraud assemblages. The root structure is so prolific, variable, and unstable--it is so hard to trace the fraud. The rhizomatic lines seem to run from the Whitehouse to the UK Parliament, to India's Parliament, and on to several dictators. People are beginning to panic. So many corporations are falling, and Arthur Andersen seems mired in them all. Investors no longer trust the U.S. markets. The refrain of fraud assemblages is dampening confidence. But fraud will seduce anew. Arresting a couple of WorldCom executives and a lieutenant to Fastow will not stop fraud.

Change the rules and fraud will find a way around them. Change the cast of characters and fraud will recruit another cast. Collective memories of Enron's raptors will

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fade. The new rules will not bottle up fraud. The rhizomatic lines will crack the surface, and fraud will be disguised as Free Market capitalism once again. "Fraud will push right into the capital" one more time (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 353).

**Rhizomatic Assemblages of Antenarratives** - Antenarrative trajectories form rhizomatic assemblages that can ensnare fraud. It works both ways. The assemblages will reach back to the memories of the Seven Sisters, and see the Seventh Sister is Enron. This is the Theatre of Capitalism, a dialectic battle between fraud rhizomes and detective rhizomes. It is like the battle on the Internet between virus and virus detection. Without fraud detection, fraud would become endemic to Capitalism. We would never be rid of it. The impersonal rhizomatic and secretive partnerships schemes veil the interests of the perpetrators. It is a detective's task to trace the rhizomatic antenarrative trajectory patterns.

Lay and Skilling and Mark gave capitalism a personal and romantic charm that investors and regulators and politicians could identify with. Rooting out the tubers is just one way to impersonal and tragic to capture much prolonged public attention. There will be a brief purge, then back to business as usual. Capitalism will once again put on its magic mask and use the strange hypnotic power of spectacle to delude the "spectator" (Fetter, 1931: 4). Once again we shall be as Shakespeare's character Titania in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and fondle the ass's head (p. 4). The courts will glimpse momentarily the grotesque and burlesque face of capitalism, then be intoxicated by the spectacle and see only romantic surfaces.

My dialectic theory is that for Enron begins in an antenarrative rhizome process, and ends up in mega scandals packaged as coherence narratives with plots to entertain and re-educate us. Yet elements of the narrative refuse to cohere, the forces of antenarrative unravel, first the romantic plot of Enron the New Economy role model corporation that has transformed itself from brick and mortar utility to virtual corporation. Enron's gas bank, along with its emerging off-the-balance sheet special purpose entities, realizes and then derealizes wealth and reputation for Enron executives. Characters begin to disenroll in the Enron narrative, and antenarrative counter forces disintegrate the romantic plot, while Congress and various agencies rescript more tragic narrative plots. There are many comedic and satirical antenarrative unravelings. On the

surface there is a narrative of dramatic changes to accounting rules, executive insider trading rules, and increased oversight from the SEC, GAO, and a hoard of Congressional oversight committees. Yet, beneath that surface erupts the antenarratives that suggest that narratives of containment are a thin veneer, as capitalism itself seems to veer out of the orbit of human and institutional control.

### **Implications of Antenarrative Theory**

There are several important implications of antenarrative theory for future projects. First, narrative methods can no longer ignore antenarrative dynamics. It is important to not only compare narratives but also to see how antenarratives form, reform and transform in intertextual ways. In the case of Enron, scandal, strange accounting practices, and political influence were ingredients from the beginning.

Second, analyses that refer to a unitary universal narrative (e.g. “The story of Enron is the story of unmitigated pride and arrogance,” says Jeffery Pfeffer, as cited in Pearlstein and Behr 2001: A01); such reductionistic tag lines, in my view, miss the morphing of antenarratives (such as the Gas Bank) and their changing intertextual relationships through complex rhizomatic practices.

Third, fixing narrative terms and pentadic ratios at one point in time, misses how ratios shift across antenarrative trajectories. For example, a Burkean-type of plot ratio can become a shifting ratio over time. Burke (1945/1952), for example, proposes ratios such as act/scene and agent/scene. There are intertextuality and rhizomatic relationships that must be traced, not just in ratios but in the storytelling soup from which such narrative taglines are applied.

Fourth, it is important to look at the emergence of networking of antenarratives in future studies.

Fifth, each antenarrative conveys an ideological framing by the analyst, that is quickly opposed by counter-frames of other analysts (e.g. Table 2 plots). For example, the ideological framing of Enron as the superstar of Free Market capitalism is opposed by the ideology of Enron and its global pawns where deregulated power costs more and is less efficient, and where Enron is a frequent violator of Human Rights around the globe; and these ideologies are opposed by one that says that Enron is just greed and hubris, or just the fault of Auditing fees (that pay a little) mixed with Consultancy fees (that pay a

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**Comment:** Needs to be developed like the others to make the reason for importance explicit.

lot). The more grotesque frame of critical theory suggests that Enron is the resultant of predatory and hyper-competitive practices of global capitalism; a more romantic frame argues that the Enron and Arthur Andersen spotlight turned the state's attention on ways to repair 401 k plans, close loop holes in annual report notes, change the incentives of executives in reformations of stock sharing laws, and changes to political contributions which are expected to put a cap on corporate and PAC giving. Whether this is an actual repair to the checks and balances of late modern capitalism or an exercise to restore consumer and investor confidence in Business and the State, time will tell.

Finally, it is important to trace the antenarrative roots of Enron's collapse in 2001 go back to its beginning (of corporation & industry) in ways that are rhizomatic and intertextual.

### **Post-Story**

In sum, everyone wants a simple story to make sense of complex dynamics, but this is not always helpful. In the case of Enron, the eight antenarrative clusters are contextualizing and recontextualizing processes of change. The antenarratives recruit a cast of characters and constitute one side of the dialectic of story and narrative.

In tracing the antenarrative versions, the competing pre-stories, and the contested, unresolved histories, we can see more clearly what patterns appear. Antenarrative and narrative in dialectic relation, makes a contribution to inquiry by exploring the gaps and excesses excluded in traditional narratology.

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